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A CHOICE OF EVILS.

Chas. D. Hester

A CHOICE OF EVILS.

A Novel.

BY

MRS. ALEXANDER,

AUTHOR OF

“THE WOOING O’T,” “FOUND WANTING,”
“A WOMAN’S HEART,” “FOR HIS SAKE,” ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CHAPTER I.

PARTING.

THE pleasant town of Langford in that highly favoured county Southshire, was considered by its inhabitants as quite equal to the capital, in cultivation, enlightenment and society. It stood on the slope of a low range of hills, commanding an outlook over a richly-variegated plain on one side, and the thickly-wooded irregularity of the uplands on the other.

A number of gentlemen's seats studded the surrounding country, the owners of which were on neighbourly terms with the gentry of the town, the social bonds between them being all the closer, because several of the

younger and impecunious members of the county families condescended to manage the Langford banking, legal and medical business, and deigned to make money in a way that would once have been considered derogatory by such personages.

Rents were low in Langford, so was the death rate, and a fair amount of sport was to be found in its neighbourhood. It was little more than four hours from London, and added to these advantages it possessed an excellent preparatory school for boys. Pretty villas, of various dimensions, from the handsome Elizabethan house, surrounded by pretentious grounds, to small "Queen Anne" structures, with neat gardens back and front, grew up in and about it, besides some older *cottage-orné* abodes—covered with roses and clematis, and furnished with grass plots, and a flower border behind.

Of these latter, none were more neatly kept than Navarino Cottage, the residence of Commander, or—as he was usually called—Captain Josiah Rowley, R.N.

It was his own property. He had purchased it on his retirement from active service some fifteen or sixteen years before, when prices at Langford were considerably lower than at the date of this true tale. Here he established himself, a widower with a little fair-haired girl, and a lanky boy of twelve or thirteen.

One of his chief attractions to Langford was the society of the vicar and his wife, friends of early days, with whose children his daughter grew up, sharing their play and their lessons, taking her turn in driving their village cart, and in riding the shaggy animal that drew it.

Captain Rowley came of a good old Lancashire family, and, though a stranger, was well received by Langfordians generally.

He was well-bred in a bluff, sailor-like fashion, and a fairly good shot, while his political views, of the true blue order, were exceedingly acceptable to the majority of his neighbours—moreover, he had the air of sturdy independence which always finds

favour with Englishmen, however the possessor may suffer from lack of gold.

Of filthy lucre, Captain Rowley had but little, though no one ever heard him complain. He was a strict economist, and an equally strict disciplinarian, at least as regarded his son. His daughter—well, this story will show how he managed her.

It was a glorious autumnal afternoon about five o'clock, when Captain Rowley strolled slowly homewards from his nearly diurnal visit to the club, another of Langford's advantages.

Navarino Cottage, as everyone who has lived at Langford knows, was situated in Oak Tree Lane, just beyond the turn from the high road to Westerton, which here made a short, steep descent; consequently the windows in front of that snug little dwelling commanded a wide view over the plain below, now yellow with golden grain ready for the sickle, interspersed with spaces of rich green pasture land. Overhead, a few fleecy white clouds moved slowly across the

bright blue sky, while the sleepy hum of insects was occasionally broken by the tinkle of a sheep-bell from a flock browsing on a piece of common, which stretched downhill at the other side of the lane.

One of the oak trees from which the lane was named, grew at the north end of the cottage, sheltering with its wide-spread branches the narrow strip of pleasure ground which intervened between a low wooden paling and the house, and which the owner kept in a high state of neatness and greenness.

It was very warm and had been a breathless day. Captain Rowley paused on reaching his own little domain, lifted his straw hat and wiped his brows, looking all the time keenly at the shrubs and flowers within the paling as if seeking for some tokens of neglect; then he opened the gate, and walked up a side path which led past the end of the house to a second wicket, so passing through a small yard into which the kitchen opened and where some fowls

scratched and clucked behind a wire netting, he entered the house by the back door. Passing the kitchen, into which he looked with a frown, he entered the drawing-room.

Though low, it was of fair size, with two windows commanding a view over the country below. The furniture was old-fashioned and plain, but a couple of dwarf book-cases well filled, and plenty of ordinary flowers, gave it a home-like aspect.

The room was not untenanted—on a sofa near the fireplace, now masked by ferns, a young lady half-sat, half-lay, resting on her right elbow. She was reading a rather ponderous book which was propped up against the sofa cushion, while one foot hung a little below the seat—a very neat foot and ankle showing beneath her fresh blue and white cotton frock; a large shady brown hat lay on the floor near her, with a pair of wash-leather gloves tossed into the crown.

She was so intent on her book that, the door being open, she did not hear her father's

approach until he said in a rather indignant tone :

“Janet!”

She started from her semi-recumbent position to her feet and stood upright, a tall, slight, but rounded figure, surmounted by a well set-on head, amply supplied with light brown gently-waved hair, gazing at him with a slightly puzzled expression in her almond-shaped grey eyes from under lashes and brows a shade or two darker than her hair.

“What are you wasting your time lounging there for?” he demanded; “have you nothing to do but to read novels all day?”

“It’s not a novel, but almost as fascinating, at least, all the parts I don’t skip are,” she returned, a very sunny smile parting her lips. “Have you ever read it, dear Dad? It is by Gardiner Wilkinson, all about ancient Egypt, with lots of pictures. You can’t think how wonderful——”

“I should like to know what good these

out-of-the-way useless books can do you?" interrupted Captain Rowley. "It would be a great deal better and more improving if you went into the kitchen and saw to the preparation of dinner. Pray do you know that the kitchen door is wide open, and not a sign of Barbara to be seen?"

"Oh, yes!" stooping to pick up her hat and gloves, "she asked leave to go and see her mother, who has a sore throat. That is the reason I stayed in to take care of the house, but she ought not to have left the door open."

"Great care, indeed! When you were so lost in that nonsensical book that you never heard me come in!"

"Yes, that was rather stupid of me, but then, you know, there are no thieves or burglars in Langford," she returned, watching his face, half-smiling, half-concerned.

"The fact is you can never manage that girl nor any girl."

"Perhaps! but what I *can* manage is to kiss *you*!" and she suddenly threw her

arms round his neck. In truth, she was very nearly as tall as the old sailor, who was neither dignified nor good-looking, having a breadth of shoulder disproportioned to his height, a large, bony, weather-beaten face and thin red hair now toning down to grey, not to omit somewhat fiery steely-blue eyes, into which a kindly expression stole as he yielded to his daughter's embrace with affected reluctance.

“Oh, yes, that's all very well, but duty before laziness and self-indulgence.”

“Of course, Dad! I assure you I have done heaps of things this morning, and you are to have a nice roast chicken—and—and peas.”

“You don't know what I am to have! I ordered dinner at half-past eight this morning myself, and I should not be surprised if the peas are lying still unshelled in the basket, though I gathered them myself this morning at——”

“At six?—or was it half-past five?” put in Janet.

“Early enough, anyhow! They ought to be ready now.”

“I will go and see to them at once!” cried Janet, shutting up her book with an air of decision, and betaking herself, hat and all, to the cheery little kitchen.

Here she soon found the peas still unshelled in their basket, and placing it on the kitchen table, sat down with another basket at her feet, and a nice white basin in her lap, quite in a business-like manner, as Captain Rowley observed when he looked in a few minutes after.

“Well, as you are not afraid of burglars, I will just go as far as The Grange—they have some capital red-nosed kidneys there. I should like to try some in our potato patch later—for I can’t say this year’s crop is as successful as I should wish.”

“Very well, and, Dad—if you meet Maurice tell him I am busy, so there is no use in his coming up here. He wanted me to walk with him this evening.”

“Oh, he did—did he?”

“Yes, you know it is his last week in England.”

“I do, and high time for him to be doing something for himself. How many times was he plucked?”

“Not oftener than many other people!” said Janet—but she did not say it saucily, rather sadly.

“I am sure the Rector ought to be thankful to get rid of one more of his numerous brood! Remember, my dear, if that jade Barbara is five minutes late she shall go! What time did you tell her she must be in?”

“I did not tell her any time, she said she would be back in time to cook the dinner, and as I was then deep in such a delightful bit about the domestic habits of the ancient Egyptians, I just said very well.”

Captain Rowley groaned.

“I must wait for my dinner, I foresee; don’t let her hurry and spoil everything,” and he nodded to his daughter as he went out, his footsteps soon ceasing to sound when he left the crisp gravel of garden for the road.

Janet shelled her peas diligently, earnestly hoping that Barbara would soon return, as she did not feel herself competent even to boil peas undirected.

“I really must learn how to cook,” she thought; “it cannot be so difficult, or else Barbara would not get on as well as she does with only a cookery-book and her mother coming to teach her every now and then. I am terribly weak and self-indulgent—how often I have determined to stay in the kitchen and see how things are done, and then I go off to something else. Of course I cannot give up these lovely days to such tiresome work—but in the winter I shall get Mrs. Hopkins to give me some lessons.”

Here her reflections were disturbed by the sound of a step in the hall, a quick, firm step—it paused, and then a man’s voice called :

“Janet!”

“I am here—in the kitchen!” she replied, the colour deepening in her cheek, and an amused look coming to her eyes.

In another moment a young man entered

with an air of being quite at home, taking off his hat as he crossed the threshold. He was a good-looking youngster, about Janet's own age, of middle height, with aquiline features, dark auburn hair, a remarkably fine pair of brown eyes, and incipient moustaches—that did not as yet hide his pleasant smile.

“Is this the important business your father told me prevented your coming out?” he exclaimed, putting down his hat and drawing a chair opposite to her.

“Yes.”

“And it is such a lovely day, Janet!”

“I know it is, and it is a horrid nuisance being obliged to stay in, but I must not go out till Barbara returns. My father wants his dinner at six, you know, Maurice. Do you know if peas ought to be put down to boil in hot water or cold?”

“No, haven't an idea! I should fancy in hot water—they'll be done all the quicker.”

Janet shook her head.

“There must be some first principles even in boiling peas, which neither you nor I know!”

“Well, look here, Janet, can’t you come for a stroll later, when the moon is up?—it will be just heavenly in Ravensbrook Woods to-night. Come up to the Vicarage to supper, and we can take a turn on the way back.”

“I might manage that, for Dad wants to write to Tom this evening.”

“Thank you.”

There was a pause, during which Janet looked thoughtfully at the peas and Maurice Winyard gazed at her.

“I suppose I shall be on the high seas this day week,” he said at length.

“I suppose so, you lucky boy!”

“Yes, I am glad in some ways; but, Janet, it is an awful wrench saying good-bye to—to you!” and he bent forward nearer to her.

“You will be sorry to leave us, Maurice, but you will be all right in a few weeks, and as gay as a lark!”

“Do you think me a heartless fellow, then?”

“No, you have quite as much heart as is

good for you! The world would come to a standstill if men were always hankering after their homes."

"Do you know, Janet, I sometimes doubt if you have any heart yourself," he returned with a touch of pain in his voice.

"Ah, so do I!" exclaimed Janet, seriously. "I am awfully puzzled about myself. Sometimes I am afraid I am only good-natured on the surface, but hard and selfish in the depths below."

"Puzzling! Yes, you are puzzling with a vengeance, yet the sweetest, dearest girl *I* ever knew."

"Thank you," looking up with a smile that justified the term "sweet," "but you haven't seen many."

"How do you know? I have been very little at home for the last two years," in an offended tone.

"You are so used to me, Maurice."

"That is the most trying thing of all, one can so easily get too used to a person; but—Janet! do you remember the Christmas before

last, when I kissed you under the mistletoe at Mervyn Hall?"

"I do!" she returned, taking up another pod, and keeping her eyes on it, "it was a delightful evening."

"Ah, Janet, I have never felt the same towards you since. Do you know I have wanted to kiss you—ever since?"

"Oh, nonsense, Maurice! It is not polite to talk in that—that childish way!"

"It is anything but childish!" he exclaimed. "Listen to me, Janet, I am awfully fond of you! I never can love any woman as I love you; and now that I really have made a start in life, don't you think"—a short, embarrassed pause, during which he picked up one of the shells and began nervously to extract the peas—"don't you think you could care enough for me to wait till I came back?—if you would only promise to be my wife!"

"Now, Maurice, it would be the very unkindest thing I could do. You are ever so much too young to think of a long engage-

ment! I should just be a millstone round your neck. You have your own career to make—oh, how delightful it would be to be a man, and have a career—and then there is your mother and the girls; you are the eldest son, you know, and when the vicar is quite old, they will look to you to take care of them.”

“Well, Janet, you would be the one to help me in doing that!” he exclaimed, trying to take her hand.

“No, don’t, Maurice! they are not fit to touch after these peas. Then there’s another thing, I am not going to fall in love with *any* one, that I am *quite* determined.”

“Why, Janet, you are the very girl to fall desperately in love. You have been always in love with some one. You were very bad about Robert Bruce, and you had a tremendous turn about Garibaldi, and even that high and mighty Palliser, of Mervyn Hall—you talked of nothing else, when his unfortunate wife was burned to death in that hotel fire.”

“But, Maurice, everyone was talking of him! All this is just imagination; now that I am older and wiser, I am *quite* determined not to fall in love. Look at Helen Verner, how changed and miserable she is since she was engaged, two or three years ago, and your own sister, since she married Mr. Robinson, and—oh! many others.”

“Then do you intend to be an old maid?”

“No—o, I am not sure. I shall be probably, for I have no money! If I marry a nice, kind man, I can be very fond of him without being in love.”

“You are horribly worldly, Janet!” exclaimed Maurice, trying to pull his growing moustaches.

“Perhaps I am, Maurice,” thoughtfully. “At all events I never will marry a poor man, never! I don’t mind being poor with my father—dear old Dad. He can’t help being hard up, and though he storms at me now and then, he’d give me his life if it could do me any good. I don’t care for finery, but

I *do* like ease, and pretty things, and to travel; and oh! I *should* like to ride. Then to feel oneself a burden on a poor man. Oh, it would be intolerable. Dear, dear Maurice, don't trouble about *me*, put me out of your head and enjoy yourself. It is a grand thing to feel that the world is before you, and that you have a good start."

"I can't understand you, Janet, but I see you do not care for me *now*. I don't believe I shall ever love any girl as I love you."

"Oh, yes! you will love a dozen. You are ever so much too young to think of marrying or engaging yourself. If I were a man I would not marry till I was ever so old."

"But I suppose you don't think *yourself* too young to marry now?"

"No, I am really older than you."

"Nonsense. Why, Janet, I am six months your senior!"

"Years don't count—a woman of nineteen is older than a boy of twenty."

"Let us discuss that by moonlight to-

night. You will walk with me all the same, eh, Janet?"

"I will," putting the white bowl, now more than half full, beside the basket on the table, "for oh, Maurice, I *am* awfully sorry to lose you, so is your mother," she added hastily.

"The poor mother will not see much more of me," he returned with a sigh, "and she will feel it awfully."

There was a silence. Then Maurice, putting his elbow on the table, leaning forward towards his companion till he almost touched her, when his elbow slipped and knocked over the bowl, which stood perilously near the edge of the table, and all the peas were scattered over the kitchen floor.

"Oh, you awkward boy!" cried Janet. "What shall I do? Dad will be furious if he has no peas, and I hardly like to gather any more unknown to him."

"I am awfully sorry," exclaimed Maurice, profoundly penitent, "can't we gather them up?"

“Yes,” said Janet, with sudden determination, “we must.” She jumped up, ran to a cupboard in the wall, and returned with a dustpan and brush. “Just sweep them up Maurice, then I will put them in the colander and pour water over them, they will not be any the worse.”

This had hardly been accomplished when the truant Barbara returned; she was greeted effusively, and left in possession of the kitchen.

“It is too late for a walk now, I am afraid, Janet,” said Maurice. “Besides, I would rather have a moonlight walk, wouldn’t you?”

“Yes, but I am not sure whether I ought to go,” returned Janet reflectively, “suppose we take Mary too?”

“I did not think you would be so unkind, Janet! Why, it will be our last walk together for many a year, though I don’t suppose *you* care about that.”

“I do, Maurice, more than—than you think,” she returned with unexpected tender-

ness. "I will be sure to come up to supper!"

Her young lover caught and kissed her hand.

"Ah, Janet! you do care about me a little?"

"Enough to make me long for your success, and that you should become General Sir Maurice Winyard, without losing either legs or arms on the way."

"If I write—will you answer my letters?"

"Yes, Maurice, certainly! I love writing letters and receiving letters."

"No matter who writes to you?"

"It quite depends on who writes them," said she with dignity.

"How I shall look forward to yours," began Maurice, when the click of the garden gate closing warned them of approaching interruption, and in another minute or two Captain Rowley came in.

"Hollo, Maurice! I have just met your mother and sister; they were going to tea with Mrs. Hastings and begged you would not

be late—half the old women in the place are assembled to bid you good-bye—and, Janet! Mrs. Winyard wants you to go up to supper. I am going to write this evening, so I shall not want my hit at backgammon.”

“Very well, Dad.”

“I will see her home!” put in Maurice.

“All right, my boy! You’ll soon be escorting the belles of Bombay in their morning rides! Ah! it’s a grand thing to be at the starting point of the race; be off now, don’t keep your mother waiting.”

Maurice caught up his hat, and waving adieu to father and daughter, walked quickly away down the gravel path and disappeared through the gate.

Captain Rowley sat down and wiped his brow.

“Whew! It is an exhausting day, and I am growing old! I find working in the garden knocks me up as it used not! Fetch me my book from the dining-room, my specs are shut up in it.”

Janet instantly obeyed.

“Dear Dad!” she exclaimed, kissing his brow, as she gave him the book, “you are as young as ever.”

“None of your nonsense, you deluding monkey. Has that baggage Barbara come in?”

“Oh, yes, long ago.”

“That’s right. Then I shall not send her off this time.” A pause, while the old sailor adjusted his glasses and opened his book. “I am not satisfied with Tom!” he exclaimed abruptly, “not at all satisfied. I told him to write his weekly letter every Sunday, and he has missed twice lately.”

“But dear father, he never fails to write once a week.”

“That’s not it! Sometimes he writes on Saturday and sometimes on Tuesday. It shows a want of method—a—I’ll tell him what I think of it to-night!”

“Don’t write crossly, Dad. It must be bad to have disagreeable letters from home when one is far away.”

“Well, women *are* contradictory creatures!

Why, you quarrelled like cat and dog, when you were together!" growled her father.

"Never mind, we are very good friends when we are apart."

"Janet," resumed Captain Rowley, laying down his book after a few minutes' silence, during which Janet knelt on one of the window seats, and resting her arms on the ledge, gazed at the scene before her, without seeing it, so lost was she in her own imaginings, "I wish you would look at my dress suit. I haven't worn it for months."

"Why? where *are* you going?" coming to sit on the arm of his chair.

"Well, you see, I met Palliser just now, as I was going down to The Grange, and we had a talk. He has just come back from—Spain, I think, and intends to stay at the old Hall till after Christmas. Gad, he looks a new man! You remember what a white, weary, worn sort of fellow he seemed at that Christmas kick-up he gave a couple years ago? He has hardly been here since.

Well, he looks as bright, and sunburnt, and jolly as a sand-boy."

"I hope he will give another party next Christmas," quoth Janet.

"He is always very friendly to me," returned her father. "I have promised to go up to The Hall for a couple of days' shooting next week, on Tuesday. He has some fellows staying with him, so I must take my best togs, and as I must run up to Town to see why the deuce they don't pay me that legacy poor old Timbertoes, Admiral Hearty, left me, to buy a mourning ring indeed—as if I would spend fifty pounds on a ring—so I think I'll treat myself to a new pair of shoes at 'Thomas's.' It's about five years since I had a dress pair, by George!"

"Yes, do, dear! I am so glad you are going to The Hall, it will brighten you up. And the Squire seems all right? It must have been an awful shock to him, the cruel death of his wife."

"It would have been better if she had

died in her bed, but the death was a great relief." So saying, the Captain resumed his book, while Janet sat on thinking till the book slid from the reader's grasp, and a low, long-drawn snore proclaimed that warmth and weariness had done their work.

Then she stole gently away to her own room, and changed her cotton frock for a dress more suited for evening, arranging her fair locks as becomingly as she could, and tying up a little posy of deep red carnations and verbena, placed it ready to fasten at her throat before going up to the Vicarage after dinner.

"One may as well leave a pleasant last impression," she said to herself as she looked in the glass, but the tears were in her eyes while she thought it.

CHAPTER II.

RANDAL PALLISER OF MERVYN HALL.

TIME the inexorable ran on, and Maurice Winyard was gone.

To the last Janet was kind, but immovable, and a final flash of indignation helped Maurice to avoid a disgraceful breakdown, when he finally said good-bye to her. She was, however, wonderfully kind and thoughtful to the tearful mother with whom Maurice was a prime favourite, and with whom she passed most of her time, as Captain Rowley was away for three or four days at Mervyn Hall.

Yet she was truly grieved to say farewell to her old playmate. Indeed, she was puzzled by her own feelings, and felt vaguely, that had she been less accustomed

to Maurice, she might have been in love with him.

Mary Winyard, her chief friend, was rather offended by Janet's indifference to the beloved brother whom she considered irresistible. Indeed, the young ladies had that mysterious passage of arms termed by the experienced in such matters "a few words," the result of which was a temporary coolness, inexpressibly painful to both, so unpleasant in fact, that it did not last long.

Three days after Maurice had said his last adieu, Captain Rowley returned, highly pleased with his visit, the sport, the host, the company, and bringing with him sundry brace of grouse, half of which he immediately despatched to his friend the Vicar.

"Eh! Janet, my dear, I've had a fine time, but I'm afraid I have stayed a little too long. You are looking dull and white, my girlie!" he exclaimed when they had exchanged greetings.

"Oh! I am quite well, but we have all been rather miserable about Maurice—*I am*

sorry for Mrs. Winyard, she is not at all strong, and she is *so* fond of Maurice."

"But she can't expect to keep a young fellow like him at her apron-string all his life!"

"I suppose not! Still, it is rather hard for her to part with him."

"It seems a great mistake to be too fond of any one."

"Well, perhaps it is!"

"Look here, Janet! I have asked Palliser to lunch here on Monday. He is coming in to the Bench, and will come on here after."

"Oh! my dear father, why *did* you ask him? It will be an awful nuisance getting a proper luncheon ready for him. Just think of all he is accustomed to, and then think of Barbara's cooking!"

"Pooh; nonsense," returned her father. "Palliser isn't a cad; what satisfies me, will satisfy him. We'll give him some cold game and a curry. I'll make the curry myself. He will not starve on that, eh?"

"No, I suppose not," returned Janet,

“you know best, but I shall borrow Helen Verner’s beautiful fruit spoons—and——”

“Gad! you’ll do nothing of the kind. Palliser is welcome to the best *I* have, but I’ll have no sham finery, by George!”

“Ah, yes, it was a shabby thought! I feel rather ashamed of myself. Mr. Palliser impressed me as being a very grand seigneur indeed, certainly not a man to treat lightly.”

“Oh, he seems much younger than he was two years ago. He asked very kindly for you, and seemed to remember you quite well.”

“That is wonderful, for I have not seen him half a dozen times, though I remember *him* quite well.”

“He is a good-looking fellow, and a capital shot! I suppose we’ll have a grand new mistress of the Hall one of these days. He talks of being down here a good deal in future; poor fellow! his first marriage was a terrible mistake.”

“I should have imagined he was too sensible to make a mistake in such a matter——”

“Bless your little heart, you know nothing about it. The wisest make fools of themselves in matrimonial affairs. I had a very sensible letter from Tom yesterday,” he plunged into a disquisition on his son’s prospects, and Palliser was forgotten.

The return of the Squire of Mervyn Hall was an important event in the estimation of Langford generally. For some seven or eight years he had been almost lost to the county. On leaving college, he had been trapped into marriage with a fascinating adventuress, and when too late, he discovered details of her past career so disgraceful that pardon and reparation were impossible. To live with her, or to get rid of her, was equally out of the question, for she was exceedingly careful not to forfeit the allowance he was compelled to make her by any imprudence, and even contrived, by eloquent and judicious silence, to create a little coterie of sympathisers who looked upon her as a victim. Palliser, a proud and sensitive man, was even more keenly alive to the ridicule

than to the pain of his position, and when the terrible accident, referred to by Maurice Winyard, freed him from the chains that galled so cruelly, he was ashamed of the joyous exultation which swelled his heart, and seemed to pour fresh youth into his veins.

Highly conservative by nature and training, the idea that the paternal acres should pass from the direct line to a kinsman he disliked was intolerable. Therefore the unexpected restoration of his freedom was inexpressibly delightful.

No wonder then that Southshire and Langford opened their arms to receive Palliser, and no one could have accepted the welcome so cordially offered, more graciously than the liberated lord of Mervyn Hall.

He dined with all who asked him, and from luncheons or even afternoon teas he turned not away. Moreover, he was lavish of his own hospitalities, at first towards his male acquaintances only, but rumour averred that he meditated a series of dinner-parties to ladies as well as to gentlemen.

It was therefore not to be wondered at that so young and inexperienced a hostess as Janet Rowley considered Palliser rather a formidable guest.

In truth she did not give many thoughts to his coming after the first discussion with her father. They would just do their best, and leave the rest to Providence. She was sure of plenty of flowers, and not even the Mervyn gardens could produce finer pears than the solitary "Marie Louise" tree which was the glory of the Navarino grounds.

"And you are going to have Mr. Palliser to luncheon," said Mary Winyard to Janet the day before that event was to take place, when the latter appeared in the afternoon with an offering of fruit and flowers, as she often did, for the Vicarage gardens were not so carefully tended, nor was their aspect so favourable as that of Navarino Cottage.

"Yes, that is, my father expects him, but he may not come; luncheon is not like a dinner, you know."

"Oh, he will not disappoint you," said Mrs.

Winyard. "He is very well bred, and, I am sure, a kind, generous man. He called here the day after my dear boy left us, and gave the Vicar a cheque for twenty-five pounds towards the repair of the schoolhouse," and Mrs. Winyard sighed as if the gift was a fresh misfortune. She was a small, gentle woman, with soft grey hair, and pretty though faded eyes. She was a noiseless creature, yet marvellously enduring, and greatly beloved by her numerous children to whom she was a kind of Providence, while the Vicar, a big, loud-voiced man of Low Church and intensely Protestant views, was absolutely ruled by her. Never had her quiet strength been so tried as by the recent parting from Maurice, who was her idol. It was no wonder that all subjects were more or less tinged with a sombre hue, and few could be mentioned without a sigh.

"That was very nice indeed," cried Janet. "Now, dear Mrs. Winyard, you must eat one of my pears. They are my very own, from the tree Dad planted for me the day I was

twelve years old, and Mary says you have scarcely eaten anything for the last week."

"Thank you, my dear, my heart is still too full to eat much, but time will reconcile me."

"You must try to eat though ; you know fasting will do no good."

"My mother is not so sensible as you are, Janet," said Mary reproachfully, "you are so wise and so strong, you can see *any* one go with dry eyes."

"If I am not naturally tearful, Mary, I cannot help it ! I am sure I miss Maurice as much as any of you," cried Janet quickly.

"Poor fellow ! few have as much heart as he has," sighed Mary.

Janet looked at her half angrily, half imploringly.

"My dear child, you must not fancy we want you to be unhappy," said Mrs. Winyard with a smile. "You must cheer us up. Mary and the rest have had a sad time of it with me, I will not give way any longer. I am thinking of going to my sister at Westerton ; a little change will set me up, I shall come

back quite myself, I hope. How did your father enjoy his visit to the Hall?"

"Very much indeed. He shot I don't know how many birds, and met some pleasant people."

"Poor Mr. Palliser," sighed Mrs. Winyard. "I remember so well all the talk there was about his wedding. He was a very impetuous, headstrong young man, and has suffered accordingly. He was an only son, you know, and much spoiled. His two sisters were older than he was—I hope he will make a nice suitable marriage now. Are you going to have Hopkins to help to-morrow, my dear?"

"Oh, no, it is not worth while for only one person in addition to our noble selves," said Janet, "though Barbara is a little awkward about waiting. However, if my father will only talk and not get cross, we will do very well," and Janet rose to depart.

"I think we may have a few lines from Maurice to-morrow or the day after," said the mother.

“I hope so!”

“Janet does not care for such trifles,” said Mary.

“Why are you so disagreeable, Mary?” whispered Janet as they left the room together.

“You know very well,” was the stern reply.

* * * * *

The expected Monday was a wild, wet morning, and Janet found it difficult to get the flowers she wanted. However, she managed to make the table look very pretty, and to put on her best “go-to-meeting” dress of thin, black, gauzy stuff—chosen with a view to economy and durability, which suited her fair complexion and bright locks—before the expected guest arrived.

He was lounging comfortably in an easy chair when she came in, talking cheerily to Captain Rowley, and he started up to greet her.

Janet looked at him more carefully than she had ever done before, and at once decided that

he was much better-looking than she thought. Randal Palliser was tall and well set up, moreover he had a decided air of distinction ; his hair was dark and curly, his eyes still darker, rather small, exceedingly keen, with a fierce light in them sometimes, a heavy moustache hid his mouth—and so concealed one important indication of character—but the chin was well shaped, though large and strong, with a slight cleft.

“I am going to venture a personal observation,” he said when Rowley introduced him to his daughter, who observed his voice was deep, almost harsh, though his accent was refined. “Miss Rowley has grown considerably since I had the pleasure of seeing her!—May I say so without offending?”

“You certainly may,” replied Janet, turning from the keen searching glance with which he eyed her from head to foot. “I have passed the age of growing, so do not disdain to be reminded of it, but I don’t think I am really taller, I only look older.”

“Well, perhaps so, I can only record the

impression I have received. It must be two years since we met."

"Not till Christmas," said Janet, flattered by his recollection of her, "you remember the delightful ball you gave."

"Very glad it has left such a pleasant memory. Shall I give another next Christmas?"

"Oh, yes! pray do!"

"Luncheon ready, Janet?" asked her father.

"Yes, quite,"

"Come, Mr. Palliser, take my daughter."

The little dining-room looked pretty and comfortable, for Janet, without asking the Captain, had lit a fire of coal and wood, which was particularly welcome on this first wet day after a long spell of sunshine.

"It is delightful to see a fire," exclaimed Palliser, "they let me breakfast without one this morning. I have been so long away that I have forgotten how to manage my servants."

Then the conversation turned on Palliser's

travels, and he gave some brief graphic descriptions of what he had seen. A bull fight, the Alhambra, the Escorial; Janet was deeply interested, and put many questions respecting the country and its people that showed she knew more of the subject than the ordinary school-bred young lady.

“I suspect you are a voracious reader, Miss Rowley?” said Palliser, with another long penetrating look, a look that, to her annoyance, brought the colour to her cheek. It was so foolish—so uncalled for—so like a mere country-bred Miss, to blush when a mere new acquaintance let his eyes rest upon her.

“I believe you,” her father was saying while she scolded herself. “Give her a book, and she’ll forget everything and everyone, and read till all’s blue.”

“Only when it is a book I like very much,” murmured Janet apologetically.

“It is an idling, useless habit,” resumed Captain Rowley, shaking his head. “Janet and I have a bit of quarrelling over it sometimes. What good can poring over books do a girl?”

—only unfit her for her natural work, and—
and spoil her complexion ! ”

“Thank Heaven ! Her studies have not as yet produced that fatal effect on Miss Rowley,” said Palliser, smiling pleasantly. “What good can reading do, Captain Rowley ?—why, make a charming companion of the reader. You must come up to the Hall, and range through the library at your own sweet will, Miss Rowley ! ”

“Oh, thank you ! ” cried Janet, her eyes sparkling gratefully. “You must not fancy my father is the tyrant he represents himself. He gives me an occasional scolding, but really, I have all the reading I want.”

“Yes, I suspect you do very much what you like,” returned Palliser significantly.

“Talking of Spain,” resumed Captain Rowley, “I remember when I was with the Mediterranean squadron, making an expedition to Granada with three of my messmates,” and he plunged into an account of the difficulties they had got into in consequence of their ignorance of Spanish.

This lasted till luncheon was finished.

Palliser did not offer to go away at once, he accompanied his young hostess into the drawing-room, and, as the rain clouds had cleared away, admired the view from the windows, and said that an open prospect was the one thing wanting at Mervyn Hall.

“It is rather too much shut in with trees. I shall have them thinned in some directions. I expect my sister to stay with me next week, then you must come and have a look through my books—I see a piano! Do you play, or sing?”

“Both, but after a very school-girl fashion,” said Janet, “in short, I can do nothing in particular,” she added good humouredly.

“Except read, eh?” said Palliser, “and that atones for everything.”

“Not quite, I fear,” she replied.

“The Vicar’s eldest boy has just gone out to India, hasn’t he?” said Palliser to Captain Rowley.

“Yes. His women-kind haven’t done crying over him yet, nor this girl of mine either.”

“ Ah,” said Palliser smiling, while his eyes sought hers, “ I think I remember you danced about seventeen times with him at my famous Christmas party.”

“ Oh, no, Mr. Palliser. There were only sixteen dances, and I waltzed with Frank Verner and Dick Palliser and two or three others,” exclaimed Janet, laughing, and a good deal surprised that the Lord of Mervyn Hall should have noticed her.

“ Poor fellow,” he resumed. “ He must be crying his eyes out over the sad parting with his charming playfellow.”

“ I assure you Maurice Winyard is not given to shedding tears. He was sorry to leave us all, but he was as glad to go as—— I should have been in his place,” cried Janet warmly.

“ Then, do you sigh to leave your happy valley, Miss Rowley ? ”

“ Yes. I am ashamed to say, for I *am* very happy, but I suppose people grow restless occasionally.”

Palliser did not answer for a moment, then he said :

“ You acknowledge yourself happy ! What a wonderful young lady ! By the way, Captain Rowley, why should you wait for my sister’s coming to give me the pleasure of a visit ? Will you and Miss Rowley come and lunch with me on Thursday next or any other day that suits you ? I will get Colonel and Mrs. Verner to come.”

“ Not on Thursday,” said Captain Rowley. “ I am going to see my potatoes planted and I can’t put it off.”

“ Well, Friday then ? ”

“ Thank you ; yes, if it is fine. It is rather too long a tramp in wet weather.”

“ It is rather too long for Miss Rowley in any weather,” exclaimed Palliser. “ I will send the carriage for you if you will allow me.”

“ Oh, no, it is quite unnecessary,” said Janet, “ I walk a great deal with my father. I can manage ten miles on end quite well. Mary Winyard and I often walk over to the Hall and trespass on your grounds. I fancy we know your woods better than you do yourself.”

"I doubt that," returned Palliser, with a sort of wistful look softening his hard eyes. "I have spent many happy boyish days tramping through them, Miss Rowley, before you were born."

"Not very long before," she returned.

"By George, you look three or four years younger than when you were here last," exclaimed Rowley.

"Well, you must show me through them," said Palliser, rising to take leave, "and we shall see who knows them best. I daresay poor young Winyard is thinking of his last stroll there, for I suppose *he* too was among the trespassers?"

"Oh, yes, of course," returned Janet with a bright smile and a little defiant nod.

Palliser shook his head as he said good-bye.

"Then on Friday I hope to see you, and if we have bad weather I will send the brougham. We can amuse ourselves indoors with books and pictures for once. Good-bye, Captain Rowley, and many thanks for a couple of delightful hours."

And Palliser bowed himself out.

“Why did you not say how nice he is, Dad?” exclaimed Janet when he had driven off in the dog-cart which had been waiting for him. “It will be great fun going to luncheon and examining the library, only I hope the books are not too handsomely bound, or I shall not like to borrow them; and I have read nearly everything at the Vicarage.”

“I think he liked the curry,” said her father, disregarding her observations, “and he didn’t turn his nose up at the bitter beer. Palliser is too much a gentleman to give himself airs. He’ll be quite an acquisition to the neighbourhood. Janet, my dear, get me the *Standard*, I’ve not had time to look at it to-day. I wish you would read a bit to me, for my eyes feel a little tired. There’s an article on the present condition of the navy (which is a disgrace to the nation, by Jove!); read it to me,” and he settled himself in his favourite arm-chair with a disgracefully obvious intention of taking “forty winks.”

Palliser drove homewards at a rapid pace;

though a rather spoiled man of the world, in spite of the mistakes and misfortunes of his earlier manhood, he had still a certain taste for simplicity and naturalness. He had been sincere in his assertion that he had enjoyed his visit to Navarino Cottage. He had a kind of liking for the old sailor, partly a legacy from his early days, those days "when the light that surrounds us is all from within," and lends a charm to all connected with them. But also he was greatly struck with his old acquaintance's daughter. Janet seemed to him the embodiment of health, mental and physical, without a tinge of the coarseness or loudness that sometimes accompanies those fortunate conditions. With all her simple straightforwardness she had "distinction," and the promise of a superb figure, thought Palliser, "not exactly a beauty, but she'll develop into something quite out of the common ; she seems like a woman one could trust, if *any* are to be trusted, and——" here a lady passed in a pony phaeton, and bowed graciously.

Palliser raised his hat, while a hard look came over his face, changing it utterly.

“Ah, madam,” he muttered, “the chances for your son succeeding to the family estates are considerably diminished. How natural it is to hate one’s successor, unless he is indeed one’s own flesh and blood. No, Mrs. Richard Palliser, your husband shall not be long heir apparent !”



CHAPTER III.

IN THE LIBRARY.

THE prosperous banker of Langford was second cousin to Palliser, and of the same name. In his boyhood they had been friendly, and he was always welcome at the banker's table, but after his hasty and unfortunate marriage a strong dislike to his relative grew up in Palliser's mind. His banker kinsman, or Richard, his son, would inherit after him, if he died without a legitimate male heir—and by his own folly he was cut off from the chance of having one, so long as the adventuress who had entrapped him lived and conducted herself decently.

He had to buy freedom from her presence at a high price, and the sense of relief consequent on her removal from this mortal scene was almost intoxicating.

He was anxious to marry, yet half afraid to risk making the all-important choice.

He must find some one whose past was known to all amongst whom she lived. She must be young, too, and fair—fair with the beauty of health—and well-born.

Palliser was a passionate admirer of beauty, and eager in the pursuit of whatever was the whim of the moment—two weaknesses which had betrayed him into the galling position he had endured for more than seven years. But that was all over now, and he felt once more lord of himself and able to think of the future with hope. The sunshine of his mood was reflected on all, down to the humblest groom in his hitherto neglected stables.

The days which intervened between this memorable Monday and the promised visit to Mervyn Hall went swiftly, for Janet was a busy creature, and rarely found her day quite long enough. Indeed, she was apt to get her time into a tangle, from undertaking rather more than she was able to accom-

plish, and then, instead of keeping steadily at work to clear it off, yielding to the temptation to read "just a few pages more" of some entrancing book; or "to try over" that new waltz which some one had sent her, when she ought to have been regulating the linen cupboard, or entering items in the "daily expenditure book." Thus she was apt to fall behind-hand, which necessitated a rush and scramble to get things into their proper order, and generally entailed a scolding from her father, a confession on her part, a tender reconciliation and a stern determination in the culprit's own mind, to begin afresh on the following Monday and to keep everything straight for ever after.

Besides the "Home" office work, Janet was of course as much a district visitor as the Vicar's daughters, a Sunday-school teacher and a member of the Dorcas club, in all of which she was more or less a failure. She believed all the tales the mendacious old women and overburdened mothers told her, and denuded herself of her

pocket-money, which was as a drop in the ocean of misery she tried to relieve, and called down stern rebukes from the Captain, for this misappppropriation of her funds. But with the poor she was an immense favourite. She never preached, she listened sympathetically to their sad stories, and sometimes wept with the narrators. She did not scold them because their houses were not in apple-pie order, moreover she always asked permission to come in as politely as she would at Mervyn Hall itself, and for all her pains, the Vicar declared that two or three visitors of her stamp would suffice to pauperise every parish in the county. He little knew how she hated the work, even more than teaching in the Sunday-school. From this task, however, she took courage to free herself when about nineteen, as there were more volunteers for this work than for other fields of labour.

She was at times cast down by the sense of her own weakness and imperfections, and determined over and over again to cultivate

self-control and reason, and above all, the habit of saying "No"—a word very impossible to Janet.

"Yet I ought to have a backbone," she thought one day, as she was returning from a very depressing round in one of the poorest districts. "I sometimes fancy I am ever so much cleverer than Mary, because I like to read tough books. But she has far more sense and is twice as useful! I wish I had not said I would try and get poor old Grannie Brown eighteen pence more out of the poor-box, for I am afraid the Vicar will not give it. He has so much to do with so little money, and I haven't a penny left. I know she will expect it, and will never believe I asked for it! How tiresome everything is! I wish I had a great deal of money—money is such a help."

Here a noise of horse's hoofs on the pavement behind made her draw to one side, but the horse paused beside her, and, looking up, she recognized Palliser dismounting.

"Ha! Miss Rowley!" he exclaimed, and

he drew the bridle over his arm. "You are out late."

"I have been out for a long time too," returned Janet, with a sigh.

"And not agreeably employed, I am afraid," returned Palliser with a smile. "You do not look happy."

"Happy—I am wretched! I have been visiting the poor people in my district, and I hate it!"

"Then don't go."

"Oh, I cannot refuse to go! It would be so cowardly and selfish to hold back, and I suppose it does *some* good," dejectedly.

"A great deal more harm than good, Miss Rowley! It teaches these people to look to others for assistance, and destroys the bracing sense of independence."

"I cannot believe it is not right to try and help the poor souls, they are more helpless than you can imagine. But I am not at all sure *I* am of any real use. The Vicar says I am most injudicious."

"I have no doubt you are!"

“But why?” she asked earnestly, anxious to get at the reason of her own failure.

“Because you are much too charmingly sympathetic not to be imposed upon,” returned Palliser, gazing at her with a look that confused her. “A woman—a young woman, who can deal successfully with the poor must be hard and unloveable.”

“There must be something wrong somewhere,” said Janet dejectedly.

“There is a great deal wrong everywhere! There is nothing more puzzling than the question how to help the poor without pauperising them. And now I am going to set a splendid example of inconsistency,” and he took two or three sovereigns out of his pocket. “Will you distribute this among your poor people?”

Janet’s eyes sparkled.

“*How* kind and good you are,” she cried. “You make me quite happy, at any rate for the present. I will go and get some change at once and give some of it to the worst-off people before I go home! There is a poor

sick boy in Miller's Alley, and an old woman who cannot help herself, but dear Mr. Palliser, don't tell the Vicar! he would want to direct me what I am to do with the money—and—you understand!"

"I understand *you* perfectly, and you may trust me, but are you going to send me off as a reward for divining your wishes?" For she had held out her hand as if to bid him good-bye.

"You see I want to go to the grocer's to get change, and I do not want to take you out of your way—so——"

"I understand! I am dismissed," said Palliser smiling.

"I really do not want you to go away," began Janet and then stopped, colouring deeply, and greatly ashamed of her own confusion.

"Ah! you are too kind to tell me the whole cruel truth, so I shall leave you, but you must not forget your engagement to lunch with me on Friday."

"Oh, no! I am very pleased to go, and I

don't want to send you away, only I *do* want to go back to one or two of my poor people."

"Well, good-bye, and when you have any more secrets to keep confide them to *me*!"

"Oh! I never have any, except *this* one."

They shook hands, and Janet turned into the main street, full of exultation.

"I am terribly late, dearest Dad!" she cried on reaching home, an hour later, knowing *what* an offence a breach of punctuality was in her father's eyes, "but I will tell you all about it after dinner."

"I hope you have a good excuse," returned Captain Rowley sternly, "for I have no patience with these irregularities! There's a letter for you from young Winyard, I fancy; Mary brought it this afternoon—now don't attempt to open it till after dinner."

When that meal was over, the Captain solemnly demanded an explanation of his daughter's delinquency; with much animation she detailed her encounter with Palliser and his generosity to her poor friends.

“Pooh!” growled Captain Rowley, “two or three sovereigns are not much to him—his readiness to give is anything but a virtue. I shall tell him he could not have a worse almoner than yourself.”

“You are a disagreeable Dad, but do so if you like. It strikes me that he won’t refuse when *I* ask him!”

“Look here, Janet!” said her father seriously, “don’t you be conceited, nor make a fool of yourself. These high class men of the world have wonderfully sweet ways with them, and seem to consider the woman they happen to be talking to the only one in the world. But you don’t suppose a man like Palliser, accustomed as he is to the finest of fine ladies, would make a fool of himself about a country-bred lassie like yourself!—you are greatly mistaken. I daresay you are worth a dozen of him, but that does not matter, your rusticity will outweigh your merits in *his* world.”

“What an unkind speech!” cried Janet, colouring to the roots of her hair, and an

angry spark lighting up in her very expressive eyes. "Do you think I am so weak, so silly, as to fancy for a moment that Mr. Palliser would think of me as anything—anything but a well-intentioned, inoffensive girl?—not, remember, that *I* consider him an unapproachable hero. If he is a well-born gentleman, *I* am a well-born lady! But I *do* think if I wanted help for any charitable purpose, he would give it to me. I wish you had not said what you have. I shall not feel at ease with Mr. Palliser when I see him again."

"What a fire and tow piece of goods you are, Janet! By George! I wish I had held my tongue! But for all that, it is right to warn you against such a smooth-tongued gentleman. Most young girls are ready enough to swallow all the sweet things offered to them—but——"

"But *your* daughter has a little more common sense, you will find!" interrupted Janet, "and now I shall read Maurice's letter," and she was soon deep in its

contents, while Captain Rowley, with a somewhat crestfallen aspect, solaced himself with the one bumper of port which was his allowance after dinner.

Meantime, Janet's colour gradually toned down. She was pleased and touched by her letter. Maurice expressed himself as sorry for showing the ill-temper of which he had been guilty when they parted, and assured her he was going to take her advice on many points, but that he never would or could regard her as anything other than the queen of his heart, and ended by imploring for a letter to meet him on his arrival at Umballah.

"I really think Maurice Winyard is nicer than Mr. Palliser," thought Janet, as she folded up her letter. "What fine honest eyes he has; now Mr. Palliser's make me uncomfortable somehow, but I must not allow myself to be so fanciful. I shall look at him as straightly as he does at me! Perhaps he thinks I am very badly dressed!" and she sighed, for Janet had a strong taste for pretty things. "I must write a nice long

letter to Maurice and tell him all about Mr. Palliser. I shall miss him frightfully if there is a dance at Mervyn Hall this winter."

"Well, Janet, what does the youngster say?" asked Captain Rowley, who was anxious to "open communications" once more with his daughter.

"Oh! he seems to have recovered his spirits a little," she returned, putting the letter in her pocket, "he is going to be desperately industrious, and get on at a great pace."

"I'm sure I hope he will! Come, Janet, are you going to give me my revenge? You gave me a tremendous thrashing last night."

"I don't think I will play with you, after your disagreeable speeches. Yes! they were most disagreeable!"

"Well, I can't help it! I'll go up to the Vicarage——"

"No, Dad! you mustn't! I hear the rain, the clouds were gathering as I came back! You shall have your game, you suspicious unkind old dear!" and she went round to

where he sat and kissed the top of his head where there was "a bright and shining place."

By Friday, the weather had settled again into a fine, grey, autumnal condition, with the wind west by north. The air was fresh, but not cold, and to Janet's delight admirably suited to exercise.

She greatly enjoyed her walk to the Hall with her father. It was just long enough to make a short rest pleasant, and the movement sent her in with a glowing colour, and sparkling eyes.

Mervyn Hall was more a charming than a splendid place, situated on the first rise of the swelling upland; it was richly wooded, with a fine deer park stretching over the steeper part of a slope. The house, of Queen Anne's period, built of red Dutch brick with white stone copings and a fine sloping roof with tall chimneys.

Janet had often passed the stately front, but had never crossed the threshold except on the occasion of the famous dance, which

Palliser, from some whim, had given on the occasion of a rare visit to the family seat.

The sober certainty of daylight stateliness invested the mansion with greater dignity in Janet's eyes, than the sights, the crowd, the hubbub of the dance.

A solemn butler conducted Captain Rowley and his daughter to the smaller of two large drawing-rooms where the master of the house was standing before the fire, which was very acceptable in the large and rather uninhabited looking room, and in a low easy chair sat a lady, a very graceful, elegant woman, admirably dressed in a dark heather-tinted tweed morning costume; she had almost black hair, and dark sleepy eyes, very different from Palliser's in expression, and yet she was like him, a sort of family likeness.

When the solemn butler announced "Captain and Miss Rowley" in very audible tones, Palliser came quickly forward to receive them with flattering cordiality, then turning towards the fireplace, waved his hand saying :

“My sister, Lady Saville, who surprised me very agreeably yesterday. I did not expect her quite so soon.”

Lady Saville rose languidly, and held out her hand to Janet, and then to her father. “*You* cannot remember me,” she said, “but I hope I have a place in *your* memory, Captain Rowley, for I have not forgotten your letting me gather strawberries in your garden when my poor, dear mother took me to see you ages ago—not long before she died.”

The old sailor protested gallantly that the halcyon day had been ever present to him.

“It must be more than ten years since I saw this dear old place,” she said, settling herself again in her chair, and continuing to talk in subdued tones to the admiring captain, while Palliser drew Janet to the window to point out where he intended to make an opening in the wood that a peep at the country beyond might be obtained.

“You walked all the way here?” he broke off from his explanation to exclaim.

“It is not much more than three miles, and I quite enjoyed it,” she returned.

“You look as if you had. I never knew before the beautifying properties of exercise.”

“Pleasant things make one look pleasant, I suppose!” said Janet in some confusion, a struggle between gratified vanity at his undisguised admiration, and a vivid recollection of her father’s warning, disturbing her equanimity.

“How does your district get on?” resumed Palliser, “and have you any more secrets to entrust me with?”

“No; but I have made some poor things very happy—thanks to you.”

“Well, you must let me employ you to distribute my charity again!”

“Oh! my father says I am not to ask you for any more money.”

“He cannot quarrel with *you* if I offer it.”

“No, I suppose not; but I shall not want any more for a while.”

“My sister hopes to act as mistress of the house for some time,” said Palliser abruptly.

“Her husband, Sir Frederic Saville, has gone to India to shoot big game, and her boys are at school, so she is alone. I think you will like her, she is bright and very adaptable.”

“She seems charming! and if she ever talks to me, I am sure I shall be very pleased.”

“You puzzle me a good deal, Miss Rowley,” said Palliser, leaning back against the window frame, and looking at her at his ease. “I cannot make out whether you have an abjectly low opinion of yourself, or are perfectly assured!”

“Sometimes I am one and sometimes the other,” returned Janet thoughtfully. “Maurice Winyard always told me I was dreadfully inconsistent.”

“What an audacious youngster! I should not dare to make such a speech!”

“No, I daresay not, but I have known Maurice all my life.”

“I see the advantages of his position, Miss Rowley——”

The announcement of “Colonel and Miss

Verner " broke off their conversation, and this arrival was quickly followed by that of a neighbouring squire and squiress, and a man who was staying with them.

Then came luncheon, which was the most amusing meal at which Janet had ever assisted.

The viands, the table decorations, the service, were all superior to anything she had ever seen before, for though some smart dinners were given at Langford, Janet was not invited to them. It was the talk, however, that amused and interested her.

Lady Saville, without saying anything striking, managed to keep the ball rolling, and to draw out everyone. She sat between Captain Rowley and Colonel Verner, the latter a rather grumpy veteran, whom she soothed and flattered into a very benign condition. Of course, Palliser had the squiress on his right, and Miss Verner—who was a good deal older than Janet—on his left, but the latter was quite happy between the squire and his guest—a bright young

barrister, well-versed in theatres, concerts, balls, and all the routine of London life—to whom she was well pleased to listen—though by no means in silence.

Luncheon over, the party set out to look at the grounds and stables, and to discuss the improvements Palliser proposed to make, and the sun had disappeared behind the western woods before the Squire's carriage and the Colonel's pony-chaise came round for their owners. Captain Rowley and his daughter, having no conveyance, were free to remain a little longer if they chose.

“Do stay and have a cup of tea with me,” said Lady Saville, in her soft, caressing way to Janet. “Randal, make Captain Rowley stay ; they can have the phaeton to take them home.”

“Or, better still, I'll drive them back myself in the dog-cart,” cried Palliser. “You don't object to a dog-cart, Miss Rowley ?”

“Oh, no ! I enjoy driving immensely.”

“In the meantime, come and look at the library,” he continued. “It was to look at it I lured you here.”

“And *you* must come with me to my sanctum,” said Lady Saville to Rowley. “I do not care for the solemnities of a library—besides, I want to show you some wonderful Indian weapons Sir Frederic sent home to my brother.”

“Come then, this way,” said Palliser, and Janet followed him down a passage, softly carpeted, and decorated with carved cabinets, huge china vases, and stands full of flowering plants, to a wide door, which admitted to a grand room, with an arched ceiling, lined on three sides with books. The fourth was pierced by tall windows, furnished with window seats, great marquetry tables, and comfortable chairs, sofas and settees, covered with dull green leather, busts, stands for holding heavy books of prints—all the usual furniture and decorations of a luxurious library appeared before the delighted eyes of Janet.

She paused when she had crossed the threshold and looked round.

“What a paradise of books!” she said, almost in a whisper.

“I don’t know that I should apply such a term to it,” said Palliser, smiling.

“I feel a sort of awe,” she went on. “After all, we are in the presence of mighty spirits.”

“Say living influences rather,” and Palliser proceeded to explain that the library at Mervyn was originally small, but that his grandfather had greatly enlarged it. He showed her the small space occupied by the original collection. “My father was a great lover of books, and bought a great quantity. Had he lived he would have made this a fine library, but he died while I was a child ; since, I have added a few works of importance from time to time.”

“Then you are fond of reading, too ?” said Janet.

“Well, yes, occasionally ! There is so much to be done, that one does not get time to do anything well.”

“Even I find that,” she returned.

“I should not have thought so,” said Palliser with a smile, “but I must not forget your poor old folk.”

“ Yes,” with a sigh, “ they take up a great deal of time.”

“ *Why* do you worry about them? At this side, Miss Rowley, are all the novels, a gorgeous array ; but you must not read any, or all of them, mademoiselle ! you must ask my permission.”

“ Very well !” said Janet, “ and these splendid-looking big books ? ”

“ They are volumes of history and biography, then travels and geography. Those shelves contain philosophical works, etc.”

“ What wealth !” sighed Janet, as she began to walk slowly round, looking at the titles.

“ Ah !” she exclaimed, “ here is one I have read about in the *Spectator*, ‘ Buckle’s History of Civilisation.’ It must be a wonderful book.”

“ It is, but I don’t think you would get through it.”

“ Why ? ”

“ It is too heavy and indigestible for so

young and bright a creature as you are," he returned.

"Being young need not make me stupid," said Janet, disregarding the compliment.

Palliser took down the first volume and handed it to her.

"Of course not, but there is a certain fitness of things which you outrage by such studies. Nevertheless, take the book if you fancy it."

"Thank you very much. I don't quite like to take it, it is so beautifully bound."

"Pooh! do not think about *that!* *You* will do it no harm; take both volumes," and he laid them on one of the tables. "Now sit down here and rest. You have been walking about ever since luncheon."

Janet complied.

Palliser exercised a sort of fascination over her, though she mentally repeated that his evident interest in herself was only the passing whim of a *blasé* man of wealth and fashion. Yet he attracted her.

She had a curious longing to try her

strength against his, still she was a little afraid of him, a little doubtful of him.

But to-day he was very gentle, and soon drew her to talk of her past life and experiences.

He was much amused at the mixture of simplicity and common sense in her talk, the utmost frankness streaked with sudden eddies of piquante reserve.

Thus he heard of how she had paid two visits to an uncle in London, the brother of her mother, who went every day to Somerset House, had a daughter about her own age, and also of the wild delight of going to theatres, and her general interest and joy at being in London.

“I suppose you found Langford rather dull after the strong excitement of Town life?” said Palliser, watching her through his half-closed eyes.

“No, not exactly! I love Langford in spring and summer and autumn, but I should like London in winter.”

“What, in spite of the fogs?”

“They were not very bad when I was there. I used to enjoy looking at the shop windows when they were lit up.”

“My dear Miss Rowley, that was not at all an intellectual amusement.”

“No, of course not; but I am not intellectual !”

“I am not sure; you have asked for a very tough book.”

“But it may be too much for me; still I should like to try it,” opening the book with a loving touch, and glancing at the contents.

There was something very charming in her self-forgetfulness, for her candour had in it nothing rough or abrupt. Her voice was soft and low, her manner so reposeful that it took the edge off whatever was sharp or trenchant in her utterance.

“Then pray take it with you! If it tires you, send for something else, the books here are quite at your service. Would you like another?—some poetry. You are fond of poetry, I suppose?—you look poetical!”

Janet laughed pleasantly as the butler

entered, and observed: "Her ladyship says tea is ready."

"What a bore!" cried Palliser; "it is quite heavenly to sit here and listen to the first volume of your reminiscences."

"You remind me that I have talked too much," returned Janet, colouring deeply.

"No, you must not say that!" exclaimed Palliser, starting up and speaking very earnestly. "Do you think me a humbug? Do you think me a soulless idiot, that I am incapable of interesting myself in your conversation? When you know me better you will think differently."

"I think you are very kind, indeed I do; but don't let us keep Lady Saville waiting for tea."

The drive back was very pleasant, and a fitting finish to one of the brightest days Janet had ever spent.

CHAPTER IV.

MORNING VISITS.

BUT the exhilarating effect did not last.

Usually a day of pleasure supplied Janet with subject matter for animated talk and agreeable thought during a week at least, while this pre-eminently delightful afternoon did not inspire her with any vivid descriptions when she spoke of it to Mary Winyard or her mother. Its principal charm was the quiet talk with the master of the house in his delightful library, and on this, she was not inclined to dilate, preferring to describe Lady Saville in glowing terms.

In truth she was much fascinated by that lady, and flattered by the notice she had taken of a mere country girl like herself. Nor did she get on very well with "Buckle's History," though it was the sort of book she loved.

She found that Palliser's face, especially his eyes, came between her own and the page. This troubled her a good deal, she did not want to think of him, though she admired him in a reluctant way, and was decidedly gratified by the attention he paid her. It was not unmixed gratification however. There was an odd uneasiness in it, a formless kind of doubt which was inseparably associated with her new friend, and both haunted her to a distressing degree. Busy herself as she would, she could not get rid of the image which was for ever presenting itself. She was for ever on the alert, and imagining she heard the sound of horses' feet, or the wheels of the dog-cart.

She was infinitely annoyed with herself for this extraordinary weakness. "I am bewitched! I *must* be bewitched," she said to herself, "for I cannot get Mr. Palliser out of my head. I am not sure that I really like him, yet I hope he will come again; perhaps he would do or say something that might break the spell. I wonder if he could be

revengeful. How useless it is to speculate as to what he is ! I shall never know, and what is it to me ?” Here her conjectures were suddenly dispersed by faint sounds which came quickly nearer ; yes, it was the sound of wheels, and visitors in carriages were not frequent at Navarino Cottage.

Another moment settled the matter, as a low phaeton, drawn by a pretty pair of ponies, stopped at the gate, and she saw that Lady Saville held the reins. Janet went forth to meet her with a frank welcome in her smiling eyes.

“So glad to find you at home,” said Lady Saville, as she alighted and gave the reins to her groom. “I quite intended to come before, but I was obliged to run up to London for a couple of days, and my brother was engaged to a shooting party at the other side of the county.”

“I am very glad to see you,” returned Janet. “Come into the dining-room, we have no fire anywhere else.”

“Ah,” exclaimed Lady Saville, pausing and looking round, “I remember this pretty little

garden quite well ; what long years it is since I have seen it ! The thought of them makes me feel quite old. How is Captain Rowley ? ”

“ Quite well, but not at home, unfortunately for him,” and Janet led the way into the pretty, well-kept house.

“ It is not at all cold,” remarked Lady Saville as they came to the dining-room door. “ Let us come in here if you do not mind. The view is charming.”

“ Oh, yes, certainly,” said Janet, and she drew forward an easy chair, but Lady Saville preferred a window seat.

“ The one thing wanting,” she continued, “ at Mervyn is a view. The house is rather too much shut in with trees, though the trees *are* very fine. It is such a long, long time since I stayed there. I must say I find it a little oppressive, but Randal will brighten it up. He likes society, and he has had rather a bad time.”

“ I hope he may have happiness in the years to come, for he is very generous,” said Janet heartily.

“Oh, yes, he is not half bad. Now, Miss Rowley, I came to ask you a favour! Will you put on your hat and come with me to return some of these visits?” and she showed a list of names. “I have been such a stranger in my own country, that I want you to back me up.”

Janet laughed.

“You do not need backing up, Lady Saville, but I will go with you for my own pleasure. I must give you a cup of tea first.”

“Thank you! I should prefer one quietly in this sweet little room to sitting up in state *vis-à-vis* to a stranger, for, though I have met *you* but once, I do not feel as though you were a stranger.”

“Thank you!” exclaimed Janet, “nor do you seem strange to me. Now, if you will excuse me for a few minutes I will bring the tea myself, for our servant has gone out.”

“Oh, do not take that trouble,” her visitor cried.

“It is no trouble! I should, in any case,

get it ready for my father," and she left the room.

Lady Saville looked after her with a wondering expression. It amazed her to see gentry — undoubted gentry, so denuded of this world's goods that they had but one servant, and yet looking presentable—quite presentable and absolutely happy! Lady Saville was fairly good-natured and quite willing to do anyone a good turn, provided it did not interfere with herself or her plans, but had never known any material privation.

Before she had done wondering about Captain Rowley's impecuniosity, Janet came in, carrying a Japanese tray with a pretty little tea service, some brown bread and butter and a small, old-fashioned silver tea-pot with a spirit lamp of less precious metal, also a pile of delicately-cut bread and butter.

"You must have had the genius of the lamp to help you, you produced all these charming things so swiftly!" exclaimed Lady Saville.

"My genius of the kitchen left everything

ready," said Janet, smiling, as she brought over a small table to hold the tea-tray, and lighted the lamp.

Then they fell into easy talk about Langford and its inhabitants.

"There is one name here I do not seem to know—Winyard, the Vicar of St. Olave's," said Lady Saville.

"He has been here for nearly seventeen years; he is an old friend of my father's. Indeed, they are the most intimate friends we have!"

"Are there a great many of them? Parsons always have piles of children."

"Mr. and Mrs. Winyard have five daughters and three sons—the eldest and youngest are boys."

"How appalling!" ejaculated Lady Saville. "It is a punishment too great for the worst criminal."

"They are very happy, however, and Mrs. Winyard is a dear."

"Poor soul! I must go and see her," as if that were a sufficient consolation.

“Yes ; pray do ! She will be pleased ; she is rather depressed because Maurice has just gone out to India ; she is so fond of him, and he is very good.”

“And a close ally of yours ?”

“Well, yes,” the unmanageable colour coming to her cheek, “though we quarrelled sometimes.”

“What did you quarrel about ?” asked Lady Saville, handing her cup to be refilled. “The usual thing I suppose. He wished to be more than a friend ?”

“Is it the usual thing ?”

“Yes, quite, Miss Rowley. People always go over the border in these cases.”

“What a pity !” exclaimed Janet. “Why is it so ?—and are you *sure* you are right ?”

“Yes, quite sure ; as to the reason—well, I do not know, except that the Creator made them male and female ! Never be deluded about friendship with a man, my dear Miss Rowley, the thing does not exist.”

“I should be sorry to believe that !”

“Now, tell the truth, did not the friend of

your youth want you to swear eternal fidelity to him before he went away?"

Janet could not help laughing.

"Yes, to be sure. That laugh was a confession, but you must be an unusually sensible girl not to have reciprocated. Why didn't you? Lovers must be scarce here. What was the matter with him?—was he very ugly, or very dull, or——"

"No, Lady Saville," said Janet, still laughing; "he is good-looking and really a nice, good fellow, but he was only my own age, and seemed a mere boy to me. I never could imagine marrying any one who was not older and wiser than myself."

"Marry!" exclaimed Lady Saville. "Oh, that would be a terribly serious ending of such an affair! But you must miss him very much."

"Yes, we do, immensely; especially his mother."

"If it quite suits you, Miss Rowley, I think we might set out. I want to meet my brother at the station; the train gets in at six,

and I must make six or seven calls in the interval. You must give me a map of the country, for I don't quite remember the localities, and there has been so much building."

"Let us begin with the Winyards," said Janet, putting the cups on the tray, "they are the nearest. "I shall not keep you many minutes," and she left the room.

"No," said Lady Saville to herself, "she does not care about that boy; she is unworldly as yet, by and by she will be like other people. I wonder how she will turn out."

She rose and walked round the room, looking at the ornaments and knick-knacks, neither numerous. "Some very good bits of old china," she thought, "and funny old miniatures. These people come of a good stock; they are gentry, though reduced to one servant; the girl looks like it—what a dull life she must have had, yet she is as bright as if all the joys of existence were at her feet. How long will that last?"

“I think,” she said aloud, as Janet reappeared, “I should like to go to Mrs. Palliser’s first ; they will probably be out, and though I do not want to pass them over, I don’t want to meet them. Randal detests Mr. Palliser, and I think his wife a horror ! She had a good fortune, you know, and does not conceal the fact.”

“I do not care for her much,” returned Janet, “and we scarcely know her ; we are too small in every way for so important a personage, but the eldest son, Dick Palliser, is not bad ; he dances very well, and I generally waltz with him at the dances where we meet—there are generally two or three in the winter.”

“Is he in the bank, too ? ”

“No. The second son is in the bank.”

“Come, then, let us be going.”

As Lady Saville anticipated, Mrs. Palliser was out, and they proceeded through their list of visits very successfully. Most of those they called upon were not at home. Mrs. Verner, who was a professional invalid, and

Mrs. Winyard were, however, visible. The former had two ruling passions—first, a craze for possessing every malady under the sun; secondly, for knowing her neighbours' affairs to the minutest particular.

They found her in a very comfortable, well-furnished drawing-room, established with many cushions, in a large arm-chair and wrapped in a knitted shawl.

She apologised at some length for not having called on Lady Saville, giving many particulars of the sad state of health which interfered so much with her social duties.

Lady Saville begged her not to think such an undertaking at all necessary.

"I will come to you instead," she said, sweetly.

"You are very good!" replied the invalid, then, turning to Janet, she asked: "Did you walk up here or come with Lady Saville?"

"Miss Rowley is kindly acting as my pilot," said her ladyship smiling. "Langford is so changed and enlarged that I scarcely know my way about."

“Oh! indeed — very nice for you, Janet! All the other young ladies will be envying you. What news have you of your brother Tom?”

“He is quite well.”

“I am glad to hear it. There was a report that he had got into some sad scrape, when Captain Rowley went up to Town so suddenly!”

“There was no truth in it, I assure you!” said Janet, smiling. “Tom never gets into scrapes. He is the steadiest boy in the world!”

“Oh! yes, *you* think so, I daresay! It did look a little odd, you know, your father going off so unexpectedly, and he had been up in Town in May. He seldom goes to London more than once a year!”

“Poor Captain Rowley!” exclaimed Lady Saville laughing. “Is it against the laws of Langford that he should go to Town more than once a year?”

“And are you going to make a long stay at the Hall, Lady Saville? You have not

been here for many years. I remember the Colonel and I had come to look at the place just after he had left the service, and see how it would suit us. You were at the Hall with Sir Frederic then, and a gay party—I remember, a *fête*—the Squire gave. The Rector and his wife (poor Mrs. Courtown died about three years after) took us, that is nearly twelve years ago, and I don't think you look a day older—ah! the Hall has been shut up ever since! I hope Mr. Palliser will soon bring home a bonny bride and settle down for good and all!”

“I hope he will, Mrs. Verner,” returned Lady Saville.

“And so young Winyard is fairly off, at last?” resumed the inquisitor, addressing Janet, “and a good thing, too! He had hung about here quite long enough.”

“Not longer than he could help!” said Janet stoutly.

“No—I suppose not! Well, I was thankful he scraped through at last, and it's just as well for *you*, my dear, that he is gone.

Young people are so silly, and apt to fancy themselves in love. He was everlastingly at the cottage, or rambling about with my little friend here, Lady Saville—a good deal too much, in *my* opinion, especially as the poor dear has no mother to look after her! Now, we all know the Winyards haven't a penny, and it would never do!”

“No, certainly not!” cried Janet, with some irritability. “You must not put us all down as imbeciles!”

“Ah, it is all very well to talk in that way, but *most* young people *are* imbeciles,” retorted Mrs. Verner.

“Oh, very well!” said Janet calmly.

“It must be curious to hear one's possible love affairs discussed before your face,” said Lady Saville, smiling. “I must say, Miss Rowley seems to take it with great equanimity.”

“Oh, we are old friends,” returned Mrs. Verner, “and take a deep interest in each other's concerns.”

“Oh, very profound!” ejaculated Janet.

Tea was here brought in, but declined, and then with politely-expressed regrets that she could not wait to see Miss Verner, who was expected in every moment, Lady Saville and Janet escaped.

“Your next visit will be very different,” said Janet, as her new friend whipped up her ponies, their heads in the direction of the Vicarage.

Mrs. Winyard and her daughter received them with kindly good breeding, and they spoke together sympathetically, while Mary seemed a little more cordial to Janet than she had been since Maurice had left, and even promised to take over her work the following morning, and spend it with her friend.

“Yes, she is a different stamp of woman,” remarked Lady Saville, as they drove away. “But how careworn she looks, and what a *corvée* her existence must have been. Good Heavens! how *can* you all live here—driven in upon each other, unable to go outside one’s own door without running against each other. You must be saints and angels not to

be the deadliest foes! Is it possible you can be content with such mental imprisonment?"

"I know nothing beyond it!" said Janet, a little startled by her companion's earnestness.

"Even so! But"—looking at her watch—"it is ten minutes to six—I must take you with me to the station, or I shall be too late for Randal, we will drive you home after."

"No, thank you!" returned Janet firmly. "I must stop here. I can walk home in twenty minutes, *and* I cannot be late for dinner."

"Oh, nonsense! Randal will be quite pleased to see you. Your father will not mind—I fancy you do pretty much what you like with him!"

"No, indeed, and even if I could, it would hurt me to vex him. I would rather say good-bye here. I would, indeed, Lady Saville."

And Lady Saville, rather to her surprise, saw she was in earnest, so she brought her ponies to a stand, and bid her young acquaintance a kindly good-bye.

“Rather a curious girl,” she thought as she whipped up her steeds, turning them towards the railway. “I thought she would have jumped at the chance of meeting Randal, for she seemed to find him rather fascinating last week. She is not quite as transparent as I expected. There is something very taking about her, though.”

Meantime Janet walked on rapidly, half surprised at her own resolution, and almost regretting it. She certainly would have been sorry to vex her father by unpunctuality, but that was not the real source of her firmness. It was a sudden unaccountable fear of meeting Palliser, though for more than a week she had wondered why he did not come, and wished to see him more than she cared to admit, even to herself. Now when the chance was offered her, she shrank from availing herself of it. She was nervously afraid of seeming to throw herself in his way, and uneasily cautious about letting him perceive the curious mixture of attraction and repulsion he exercised upon her. She was

dreadfully annoyed with herself for this folly and weakness.

“Really the result of it all is that I am less happy, that is, more uncomfortable since we knew Mr. Palliser,” she thought.

These self-communings brought her to the garden gate, and to her great surprise, Barbara announced the extraordinary fact that Captain Rowley had not yet come in. His almost invariable habit was to return home about a quarter to six, and change his morning coat for a rather smart smoking jacket; then he ensconced himself in an arm-chair in the dining-room, and read some stiff book till dinner was put on the table, the lecture being usually a cover for a gentle and refreshing snooze. To be sure his spectacles were always wide awake, and regarding the page before them with severe scrutiny.

On this occasion, however, Janet had time to put away her hat and mantle, and don an old summer dress which constituted her dressing for dinner, before her “Ancient

Mariner " returned. Evening had quite closed in and the lamp was lit.

"Why, dearest Dad, where have you been? Do you know, Sir, that there is no more reprehensible habit than unpunctuality, and you are quite half an hour behind time?"

"I am indeed," he replied, laughing pleasantly. "I cry *peccavi*! Tell Barbara to bring in dinner, I will just sit down as I am. Where do you think I have been?"

"Oh, I have not the least idea."

"I'll tell you as soon as I have taken off the first sharp edge of hunger. What's this we have for dinner?"

"Some b chamel of cod and stewed steak."

"Well, I hope to Heaven that girl hasn't hurried it first, and let it simmer to rags after!"

Having accomplished the feat of dulling the pangs of hunger, Captain Rowley pushed away his plate and said :

"I was just coming out of the club when Lady Saville drove by, and though it was

quite dusk, she knew me in a moment and pulled up sharp, right under the lamp. She gave me a smile and said, 'Ah! you have come at the right time. I shall take you as a hostage for your daughter who has just deserted me. Come, Captain Rowley, I don't like driving to the station in the dark, you must take care of me,' and she went on to say how she had had tea with you, and you had guided her round the town. By George, she is one of the sweetest women I ever met! Yet they say her husband does not get on with her. He must be a brute! So I got into the phaeton, and she drove away to the station. The train was full ten minutes or a quarter of an hour late, and I'm glad I went with her, for there were a lot of roughs about the station yard. Palliser is a deuced well-bred fellow. He thanked me most politely for taking care of his sister, and insisted on sending the groom back with the luggage and taking his seat in order to give me a lift to the turn of the lane."

"They are both very nice," said Janet.

“Lady Saville came in about half-past three, and we had a cup of tea together. It must be wonderful to be rich as she is, to have only to wish for a thing and to get it—but a little monotonous.”

“Rather a pleasant monotony,” returned her father. “I am not greedy of money myself, but the monotony of always screwing and paring is more tiresome than the monotony of riches! Not, by the way, that the Savilles *are* rich! They were, but they have lived very fast. They say Sir Frederic’s wish to shoot big game is to mask the necessity of shutting up his town and country houses. I’m told that her ladyship knows how to scatter the cash too. But what can you expect from a woman brought up without the least idea of the value of money?”

“I cannot fancy anyone in the world not understanding its importance,” said Janet thoughtfully.

“Ah, my dear, that’s because you have been pinched all your life, I am sorry to say. But it can’t be helped, you see I must keep

a few pounds together for Tom. I must give him a chance — a boy's career is more important than a girl's."

"Oh, yes, of course," cried Janet, laying her soft hand on the old man's wrinkled fist as it lay loosely doubled on the table. "You need not trouble about me, dear Dad! I have everything I want, and Tom deserves to be helped—he is very steady. At the same time, I should like to do something, I mean to earn a little money, not to take everything from you, or to be dependent on Tom by and bye."

"Oh, don't think of these modern crotchets about independence. Women have a right to be provided for by the men. Some honest fellow will take a fancy to you one of these days, and then your future will be provided for in the most natural and satisfactory way."

"I cannot see the satisfaction of it," she returned laughing. "A future that depends on some man's fancy is woefully indefinite! But I hope the best man I know will long be here to take care of me, and be taken care

of. I am not going to worry about the future too soon."

For all answer, the old sailor took and pressed the hand that lay upon his own, saying in a low tone as if to himself :

" Bless your dear heart ! "

This was the strongest display of feeling he ever permitted himself, and his daughter was perfectly content.

* * * * *

When Palliser and his sister had deposited Captain Rowley within a couple of hundred yards of his own door, they drove on for some time in silence.

Then Lady Saville said sweetly :

" What sort of a time have you had at Morden Grange, Randal ? "

" The sport was pretty good, but the company a choice collection of bores—our old member was there looking better than ever. By Jove! a man ought to be ashamed of ' stopping the way so long,' and the wild Tory trash they all talked was amazing. *I* am as strongly Conservative as any of them,

but you can no more resist the spirit of the age, than you can beat back the rising tide. The only course is to lead, to manipulate the movement, instead of letting it crush you. If I ever get my innings I shall pose as a Conservative Liberal."

"Why do you hang on, waiting to step into poor old Digby's shoes? There are heaps of towns and boroughs that would be ready enough to send you to Parliament!"

"I don't want a town constituency! It knows too much, and wants to drive, not to be led! Besides, I want to identify myself with the old county, the old place. You do not know how intense the feeling is, and above all, the desire to bury the memory of my contemptible accursed folly under a mausoleum of good strong work! Old Digby's wonderful vitality will, at any rate, give me time for sowing a fine crop of popularity."

Lady Saville listened to this and a good deal more, only throwing in a tactful word here and there. She was not quite as much

at ease with her brother as with others, especially when alone with him. Then, an invisible observer, had such a thing been possible, would have perceived something in her words and manner like "feeling her way" with the masterful master of Mervyn Hall.

Palliser spoke more to himself than to her, and she was pleased to let the current of the conversation drift as far as possible from herself.

It was quite dark when they reached the Hall. The wide open door let the bright lamp-light stream out upon the gravel sweep before the entrance, and attendant spirits in the shape of a clerical-looking butler and two liveried satellites descended the steps to assist their employers in the difficult effort of alighting from the low carriage.

Palliser gathered up the various letters addressed to him which lay on a table in the large square hall, and retired to make his toilette.

When he and his sister met at dinner, which was laid in a morning-room less spacious than the great dining-room, but still large and handsome, Lady Saville was dressed with great simplicity, though most becomingly, in grey silk with some black lace on the corsage; her glossy black hair carefully arranged, but without ornament of any kind. Palliser looked at her very searchingly before he fell upon the good things set before him. Neither spoke much during dinner, and what they did say was upon the most ordinary topics.

The servants having left the room, Palliser filled his sister's glass and his own with old *Château Margaux*, and said with a mocking smile :

“How have you disposed of your fine clothes, Gertrude — sent them to your uncle's?”

Lady Saville laughed.

“Thanks to your generosity, Randal, I have kept the few I had, but preserve them for resuscitation and transformation in time

of need! Really, sincerely, I am going to be most economical, even to dowdiness."

"I never saw you look better than in that gown, Quaker-like though it is," he returned. "Yes, you are a pretty woman, unfortunately for yourself, Gertrude!"

"I cannot see that it does me any harm," she said demurely.

There was a short pause. Then Palliser took a few nuts, cracked one, and said slowly:

"Yes! I did you a good turn, now is the time for you to pay me back."

"I am quite willing to do so, Randal! Though you do not want much help, you can get what you want without much chatter or scandal!"

"I am not sure, Langford is like all other small places, horribly given to gossip, and I especially want to escape being talked about, so you must act screen and carry out my directions."

CHAPTER V.

AT THE HALL.

THIS visit of Lady Saville's to Navarino Cottage, was the prelude of closer intercourse. As the October days grew shorter and touches of frost crisped the air, deepening and heightening the rich autumnal tints on the falling leaves, few of them passed without a visit from the Squire of Mervyn Hall, or his sister, and Janet began to surmount her uneasy admiration and vague distrust of the former.

The Captain's territories were situated at the junction of Oak Tree Lane and the high road, before it entered the town; the growing intimacy between the Cottage and the Hall, did not therefore attract as much attention as if the Rowleys had lived the other side of Langford.

The Southshire hunting season had now begun, and Palliser, who was a keen sportsman, was out of doors as long as daylight lasted, and often longer.

“In fact, I am alone nearly all day!” said Lady Saville one fine sharp morning; she had come in before luncheon, as she occasionally did, and so found Captain Rowley at home. “I wish you would be ‘real kind,’ my dear sir, as the Americans say, and lend me your daughter for a few days. In November there is to be a big party at the Hall, a man’s party, so I am going to stay with my sister until it is over. Her husband General Dashwood, has a command at Aldershot. Then I return and stay till after Christmas. In the meantime, I am bored and dull—do have compassion on me, Janet!” (she had grown familiar enough to call her by her Christian name). “I have no greater temptation to offer than good fires, a large supply of novels from Mudie’s and complete freedom, for Randal starts off to-morrow to a friend’s house in Norfolk.”

"If my father does not mind, I should be very pleased to stay with you," said Janet, sparkling all over with a happy smile. She had grown very fond of Lady Saville, whose caressing manners and flattering speech made her almost irresistible to a young imaginative girl. But you too will be lonely, dear Dad, if I am away?"

"I shan't mind for a little while," he returned. "I know it will be a treat for you, to stay with Lady Saville."

"Thank you, my dear Captain Rowley! and when my brother comes back (he will only be a few days away) you will also come to us?"

"Thanks, yes. Just to take this child home again."

"Well, Janet, will you come to-morrow? Randal will be driving in to catch the 3.0 train, and the carriage can call for you after."

"Thank you, Lady Saville, I shall be quite ready."

"Are you sure you don't mind being alone, dear?" asked Janet, slipping her arm

through her father's when he returned from putting Lady Saville into her carriage.

"Who—me? Not at all. I have a lot to do regulating the garden and the conservatory, besides my club work—I am on the committee now, and I am convinced there has been no end of speculation and mismanagement for the last couple of years! Don't you trouble about me, my pet, go and enjoy yourself. I am right glad you have a chance of being with a high-bred woman like Lady Saville. It's a sort of education—not that I want you to imitate anyone, my dear—but she is a capital model, and it will do you good to be with her!"

"Very well, Dad, but I am afraid my manners will never be like Lady Saville's."

"They are not bad, anyway"—a pause, during which Captain Rowley seemed lost in thought, then he said, as if to himself: "He'll be away a fortnight at least, I fancy."

"Who, father?—Mr. Palliser?"

"Yes. I suppose he is going to Lord Dacre's. I am told there's a couple of very

handsome daughters there, and I daresay now he is a free man he will want to give the hall a suitable mistress—of course he'll look high for a wife."

"No doubt," said Janet, and turned away, leaving the room to give some direction to Barbara.

She was distressed to find what a pang her father's words struck to her heart. What he suggested was probable enough, and yet, if his suggestion proved prophetic, how would it be with herself? In spite of all her efforts to be reasonable—to avoid construing Palliser's constant seeking for her society into anything beyond pleasant, cordial friendliness—she knew that she would feel bitterly the sense of desertion and deception of the worst kind—self-deception. Then words and looks—which had made her eyes droop, her heart beat wildly—came back, and roused agitating doubts of the speaker's true meaning.

Even if Palliser ever dreamed of anything so romantic as marrying her, should she ever feel at rest and at home with him? She

almost doubted it. How ardently she wished to break the disturbing spell he had thrown over her, and how profound would be her self-contempt if she found she had given him the gold of passionate affection, for the counters of pleasant passing admiration. . . . How weak—how miserably weak she had been! Well, in future she would be more worthy of her own respect. She wished the dear father were rich, or at least well off, and could take her away to some of the historical cities of the Continent, where in new scenes she would soon forget. “Surely,” she thought, “it is more my fancy, my imagination, than my heart that is touched. I will *not* think of him any more”

Nor did she for half an hour. Captain Rowley having gone out to attend a preliminary meeting of the committee appointed to enquire into the club finances, Janet instinctively sought distraction in writing to Maurice Winyard, whose letter, now more than three months old, she had not yet answered.

This accomplished, a sudden question arose to worry her. Would Mr. Palliser call to-morrow on his way to the station? Just to say 'Good-bye?' It would not be an extraordinary piece of courtesy if he did, yet it would try her self-command severely. She was now determined to assume an aspect of pleasant friendliness, and suppress all tokens of shy, almost timid pleasure in his society which she feared she had hitherto betrayed. Why should she treat him as a superior being? He was richer, and more experienced than herself—he had a dominant air that affected her more physically than mentally, that was all—but it was a great deal! Yes, she almost hoped he would *not* come, yet she would be greatly disappointed if he did not.

It was quite a relief when Captain Rowley came into luncheon, full of the financial iniquities already scented by the committee, and a little elated by his sense of superior penetration and practicality as compared to his committee mates.

“They have chosen old Dobson because he

was a lawyer before he came into money and retired from business. By George! he is a regular timber head, and in such a taking about the responsibility devolving on him that he is no use at all. I wish Palliser (Richard Palliser, I mean) had come on the committee. *He* knows what he's about—but he's too big a man to be troubled about such trifles as a paltry provincial club. His private room in the bank is club enough for him."

"You must keep them right, Dad," said Janet, "and now tell me what you are going to do this afternoon."

"Well, I don't exactly know. I'm told they are to sell off most of the garden and farming tools at poor Bennett's on Monday, there's to be a division of the property between the sons and the step-mother. I'd like to pick up a grass-cutter if there's such a thing to be had cheap. I could do the grass myself then, and it runs away with a deuced lot of money hiring a mower every week or two."

“Let me go with you, then. I want a walk — a walk with you, dearest Dad. Coming back I must stop at the Vicarage and tell Mary about Lady Saville’s invitation, she will look after my two particular old women for me while I am away.”

“I shouldn’t mind going to see them myself if you wish it.”

“I am afraid you would frighten them. You know, you sometimes have a rather gruff quarter-deck manner,” returned Janet, shaking her head.

“You are as saucy a monkey as ever tormented an old salt. Come along, it is a splendid fresh afternoon, put on your hat, and we’ll see what we can pick up at Bennett’s.”

* * * * *

The next morning was fine also, but colder with more wind, and in spite of her stern resolution, Janet felt nervously alive to every sound as the hour at which the express to London was due approached. Two o’clock — if Palliser was going to call, he must come

soon. Half-past two!—Janet hastily put on her second-best frock, which she intended to wear every day while at the Hall, and as hastily recommenced her not very extensive packing. Twenty minutes to three—there was hardly any chance of seeing him now—it would only be “a grasp of the hand hastening on,” if he did come. Quarter to three!—Janet’s hurry ceased, and she finished her arrangements with almost sad tranquillity.

At half-past three the brougham from the Hall drew up at the door; the attendant groom sent in a message that he feared the carriage was late, but her Ladyship had given the coachman some commissions to do in the town. With these words the functionary in top boots handed in a brace of plump partridges with “Mr. Palliser’s compliments.”

Janet bade her father an effusive farewell. At the moment she felt strangely reluctant to leave him, but he seemed so content at her going, that she told herself she was silly

and sentimental, with which conviction she drove off.

Lady Saville came down to the door to receive her young guest, and conducted her upstairs to her private sitting-room, where tea was ready.

What a charming house it was, thought Janet, everything in it was more or less beautiful. It looked as if the owners and occupiers were lifted high above every sordid and degrading want, elegance and nobility must dwell within its walls and happiness in its daily life, yet Lady Saville looked neither well nor happy.

“So glad you have come, dear child! I have felt unspeakably desolate since Randal left this morning.”

“I daresay you do, Lady Saville! He is so bright and amusing, you must miss him.”

“Poor fellow! It is something new for him to be bright and, you know, men are seldom bright with their own people at home. Now, let us have some tea. Then we shall have light enough for a walk, and get up

an appetite for dinner. You are a great walker, are you not, Janet?"

"I am afraid I am not great at any thing, but I walk a good deal with my father."

"That is probably the reason that you look in such enviable health! I will try and walk while you are here, perhaps I may reap a similar reward."

"You are not looking very well, Lady Saville," looking at her with affectionate interest.

"I often have nervous headaches, and everyone has her own worries, but I shall feel better now *you* are here! Randal had a lot of letters to write. He is thinking of selling a place he has on the Sussex coast. It is a sea-side villa, but a nice enough place, only *he* has unpleasant associations with it! This entails no end of lawyer's letters. He is going to stay in Town for a day on account of it."

"Is there to be a large party where he is going?"

"Yes, I fancy there will be a good many

in the house. It is a semi-political gathering, which is my brother's real attraction, though Lord Dacre has rather fascinating daughters, but Randal has not been very much inclined for ladies' society of late years. I am thankful he is taking it up again. It is rather bad for a man to be disgusted with women!"

"It is a little unjust to be disgusted with women because two or three are bad, is it not?"

"Of course it is! But do you imagine that men are just? That is the rarest quality amongst them."

"Are women more just?"

"I do not know; I do not fancy they are!"

"What an unfortunate world, if there is no justice either in men or women."

"It sounds very bad, doesn't it?" said Lady Saville, "but I am afraid there is *not* much justice. Now, if you will not take any more tea, we will go out. I think we may manage to go as far as the Home farm and back, but first come and see your room."

It was a large sunny apartment, hung with pale apple-green chintz covered with roses and deeper green leaves. The furniture was inlaid with various coloured woods, and the drawers and cabinets had finely-worked brass handles and ornaments. There were easy chairs, a sofa, a dwarf bookcase, a writing-table with all the necessary appliances, an over-mantel with china vases, and biscuit figures—in short, enough pretty things to make any drawing-room look lovely. Janet thought as she looked round.

“Give Collins (my maid) your keys, and she will put out your things,” said Lady Saville.

Janet laughed.

“I shall feel ashamed to put so grand a room to so common a use as to sleep in it,” she replied. “My poor little box looks quite lost. Thank you, Lady Saville, I prefer unpacking my own belongings. I am never long in dressing, and there will be quite time enough to unpack and dress when we come in. You ought to have put me in less splendid quarters.”

“Why, my dear child? It is light and airy, but nothing remarkable otherwise. The view is pretty,” opening the window, “it is the same as from the drawing-room; only better, being on a higher level. This used to be my eldest sister’s room, and my sitting-room, it was the school-room! Good Heavens! what ages seem to have passed between those bygone days and the present. I sometimes wonder if I can be the same creature I was then. No, I cannot believe I am! Is it not well the future is hidden from us?”

“Perhaps so,” returned Janet, “yet I often long to peep behind the veil.”

“Don’t try!” said Lady Saville emphatically.

At the outset of their walking, Lady Saville seemed preoccupied. Usually, though not talkative, she was brightly alive to what was going on, and ready to throw in opportune observations here and there—phrases which often sounded witty, if they were not so really, the result of long social training. Janet therefore tried to talk more than she

did generally, to cover her companion's silence.

Gradually, Lady Saville came back to the present, and they discussed many things as they walked briskly along through the grounds, passing a gate leading out of them into the woods, where they trod on the brown-red rustling leaves, as they followed the path winding through them, under nearly bare branches, and listened to the rare note of some lingering bird which had not yet realised that summer was quite gone. Sometimes their steps startled a pheasant, who rose with a "whirr" and disappeared, his plumage gleaming through the black stems of the trees.

"I suppose you can ride?"

"I am not sure," returned Janet. "I can ride the old pony at the Vicarage, even without a saddle, but he is so quiet."

"Would you like to ride?"

"Oh, yes, immensely."

"I shall enquire if there is anything safe and fit to carry you, in the stables. Then, if

I happen to have a spare habit here, I can give you a lesson. I do not imagine, you know, I am a good horse-woman. I used to love riding."

"Don't you care about it now?"

"I suppose I do not enjoy anything so much now. But I am frightfully in the blues, my dear Janet; you will be sorry you came here! It has been fearfully dull! Let us do something to rouse ourselves, though we have not the means to be gay. Shall we ride to-morrow?"

"I should like it, Lady Saville, but you see I have no habit."

"Ah, I will ask Collins if she has both mine here, and then I must interview old Roger, the head groom. I hardly know what they have in the stables now."

"But perhaps Mr. Palliser might not like me to ride one of his horses."

"Who? Randal? He would be very pleased. I don't think we need have any fears on that score."

They had now cleared the wood and come

out on the open, where the plough was at work turning up the rich dark loam. Here were the buildings of the Home farm—its stack yards and fowl yards. The pleasant evening sounds—the lowing of the home-coming cattle, the bark of a watch-dog, the cackle of a flock of geese, the occasional scream of the guinea-fowl, and the tramp of heavy cart horses being led to the stables, it was all charming to Janet. The wind had fallen, and the evening was fresh and clear.

“We had better not stay here too long,” said Lady Saville, seeing that her companion was inclined to linger, “it will be quite dark by the time we get home. You enjoy this sort of thing, Janet?”

“Yes, greatly, the air is delicious.”

“I suppose you would like to have such a place yourself?”

“Oh, no! It would alarm me to possess so much, a far smaller place would please me quite as well, and a little more money than we have. I could always come here and enjoy the beauty just as much as if it

belonged to me—perhaps more, because I should have no responsibility.”

Lady Saville looked at her keenly.

“I am not quite of your way of thinking,” she said, “I grow dreadfully bored in the country. When one comes to my age, society is very essential.”

“But, Lady Saville, you seem scarcely older than myself,” cried Janet.

“Thank you, but I have one boy on the point of going to a crammer’s, and another two years younger,” said Lady Saville, laughing. “No, give me London or Paris, or some continental watering place. You cannot have society in the country unless you import it from the great centres; and then, being shut up in the same house with it, it becomes wearisome! How much you would enjoy London, Janet!”

“I have no doubt I should.”

A pause, then Lady Saville asked: “Do you play billiards?”

“No, not at all.”

“Would you like to learn to-night?”

“Of course I should, but I am very stupid at games.”

“There is nothing especially difficult in billiards; then, if we can manage it, we will ride after luncheon to-morrow. I dare say some of the Castle Clare people will come over to-morrow, perhaps to luncheon; but you would rather not have any strange men with you on your experimental ride?”

“Never mind me, Lady Saville, go and ride with your friends. I have more than enough here to amuse me for days.”

“We shall manage better than that.”

This was Janet's first glimpse of the restlessness which overtakes most women who have exhausted all the world can give before they are six-and-thirty, and whose lives are hollow because their hearts are not receptive, or perhaps disappointed. She began to perceive that her new friend—in spite of the sparkling gaiety she could assume at a moment's notice—was anything but a happy woman. Still, for some reason, she made herself most agreeable to her young

guest, and Janet found a lesson in billiards a very pleasant way of passing the evening. The game interested her more than she expected. "Games" to her, meant cards, which she detested, but the movement and physical enjoyment of sending the ball into the pockets, was almost equal to lawn tennis.

Next day two men from Castle Clare rode over to luncheon. One was the second son, a young Guardsman, the other a London chum of his, and his guest.

They talked about people, things and places, totally unknown to Janet, of whom they did not take the slightest notice; while their attention to and admiration of Lady Saville were great and unmistakable.

Finally they persuaded her to ride with them.

Janet, when Lady Saville turned to her with a laughing apology, so eagerly assured her that she did not mind in the least being left alone, so long as the library was also left, that her hostess went off to dress, quite

satisfied that she had not been guilty of objectionable neglect.

"Will you not stay and entertain my cavaliers?" asked Lady Saville, finding Janet at her heels when she had left the room.

"No, thank you! I would rather not, and I am sure they would rather not. I shall take a ramble in the grounds, and then have a good long read till you come back. Pray do not return sooner than you like, I do not mind being alone."

"You are really a delightful girl!" cried Lady Saville, bestowing a kiss upon her. "You seem to me absolutely honest. Now I shall not forget to find out if I have a habit for you, and we shall have our trial trip to-morrow."

Lady Saville was as good as her word, and Janet had the joy of riding a well-broken, steady horse, quiet yet willing, on the following day. Moreover the old head groom declared the young lady was the making of a good horsewoman, and that it came natural to her to "sit square."

The days flew fast. Lady Saville grew more and more kindly as she perceived that her guest was able and willing to amuse herself, independently of all extraneous aid. They paid frequent visits to Captain Rowley, and he often came to luncheon, which he said suited him better than dinner.

“I can settle down with my book in my easy chair at home when I am tired after the day, and turn in as soon as I feel drowsy ; whereas if I have to sit up and make conversation, I’m played out in no time !” he explained to Lady Saville, who was always quite charming to the old man. To do her justice, she considered no one too insignificant to be fascinated, down to the crossing-sweeper to whom she threw a penny.

Janet had now been ten days at the Hall, and began to think she had left her father long enough, but Lady Saville would not hear of her returning home. “You must not desert me !” she exclaimed. “Randal has been kept in Town longer than he expected ;

but he will be at home certainly some day next week. Do stay till he comes?"

And Janet consented.

She was willing and unwilling to remain. It would be pleasant and exciting to be in the same house with Palliser, and she admitted to herself that she would like him to see how well Lady Saville's old habit suited her, though just a little too tight, for her ladyship was *petite*, but coming back as he would be from a houseful of beautifully-dressed elegant people, well versed in the *shibboleths* of *his* world, how could she expect that he would notice her much?—she must keep her father's warning in her mind.

For some cause, utterly unknown to her, Mr. Palliser seemed to take an interest in her, but it was highly improbable that this would last, and she was too proud, too self-respecting, to give more than was given. No, she would not stay on, once the master of the house was at home. Another reason actuated her, which some may be high-minded enough to consider a [puerile one—

she had worn her scanty store of frocks over and over again. Should Mr. Palliser invite people to dinner, she had nothing new or suitable to put on. This was what she candidly told Lady Saville, when her pleasant hostess urged her to come to a dinner to which she herself had been engaged for some time. She did not like to put it off, so she wished to take Janet with her.

“Ah!” exclaimed Lady Saville on hearing of this difficulty, “let us run up to Town for a couple of days, and get you a pretty dinner dress. It will be a pleasant break; our house is unoccupied, but we have a caretaker there who can do what we want.”

“But, dear Lady Saville, I could not ask my father for a new dress until after Christmas!”

“After Christmas!” interrupted Lady Saville. “That will just do, for, of course, three months’ credit is ready money!”

“My dear dad would not think so!” said Janet laughing. “He never leaves anything unpaid at the end of the week!”

"How dreadfully he must cripple himself!" cried Lady Saville in much surprise. "Well, then, you need say nothing about it till the period when the new garment is due, then present the bill."

"That is the greatest impossibility of all. I don't think Dad and I ever had a secret from each other in our lives! Then, as to a new frock, we consult over it for a month before it is bought."

Lady Saville laughed as if much amused.

"Yet there is very little of a man-milliner about Captain Rowley!"

"Oh, he only listens, and agrees to all I say. I enjoy talking about it—and anticipating."

So the project was given up, and Lady Saville refused some other invitations in consequence.

The dinner in question was rather a state affair at the Castle (there was but one "Castle" in Southshire) and as it was a serious function Lady Saville put on her diamonds and a grand court dress, only docked of its train.

It was a *fête* to Janet to study her new friend's toilette, to gaze with genuine admiration on the graceful, queenly look of the little woman, who was every inch a great lady.

Lady Saville was much gratified, even while she said to herself: "What a child she is!—she is born to be taken in!—she will never profit by any of her advantages. Heigh ho! what would the world be like were it full of Janet Rowleys?—very peaceful, but—rather flat! Anything would be better, though, than what it is now!" So thinking, she kissed her guest and departed.

Janet had entreated to be spared the formalities of dinner by herself, so "high tea" was served to her in Lady Saville's sitting-room as soon as that lady had set out on her six mile drive to dinner, and having dispatched what refreshment she needed, she curled herself up in a corner of the sofa with a book. A grand fire of wood and coal shed a glow over the prettily-decorated room, a lamp with a pink and white shade stood near

her, and shed a becoming light over Janet's fair hair, beautiful complexion and best dress of white muslin with blue ribbons, which, though but the work of a Langford artist, suited her well. This room was at the back of the house, and no ordinary sounds from the front reached the ears of those occupying it.

The night was clear and cold with the breath of coming winter, and Janet had to resist an inclination to gaze at the fire and dream, instead of attending to the page before her ; but she did resist stoutly, and had just succeeded in fixing her mind on her book when the door opened and, to her astonishment, Palliser walked in, looking bright and smiling, with a gleam of exultation in his dark eyes.

Janet started to her feet, feeling half frightened and wholly dazed.

"Mr. Palliser !" she exclaimed, and then stood still and silent, the vivid colour fading from her cheek.

"Good evening," he said, advancing with

outstretched hand. "I fear I must have rather a ghostly appearance, for you look 'skeared,' as the country people say."

"Well, I am," replied Janet laughing, and rallying from her start, while she left her hand in his grasp. "Lady Saville did not expect you till next week."

"Lady Saville knew nothing about my intentions, which were to come home as fast as I could, and I should have been here two days ago but for some law matters—infernal nuisance the law is!"

Janet had moved to the fire-place, where Palliser followed, his eyes dwelling on her with an expression of delight that made it hard for her to keep up the calm, friendly tone she strove to assume.

"So Lady Saville is dining at Castle Clare?" he said. "How charming to find you here to welcome me—you see I venture to take for granted that you do welcome me."

"Yes, of course I do—to your own house!"

“It was not very considerate of my sister to leave you alone!”

“She wished me to go with her, but I preferred staying here—I do not mind being alone, in the least.”

“‘The stars in their courses fought for me!’” exclaimed Palliser smiling. “I am afraid you have had rather a dull time of it. Now, tell me, have you dined?”

“Oh, yes—long ago!”

“Then you are ready for another dinner, and the dinner will be ready for us in half-an-hour, by the time I make myself fit to sit down with you. I trust you have not bored yourself very much during your abode in my old place?”

“No, indeed! I have been very happy. Lady Saville is delightful.”

“I suspect that ‘the light which surrounds you is all from within!’” said Palliser as he went to the door. “I shall not keep you long.”

Janet continued to stand by the fire, when he left the room, her heart still beating almost painfully fast. She must *not* allow herself to

be so disturbed by so simple an incident as Palliser's unexpected return to his own house, she must *not* let him see the extraordinary effect he produced upon her. Surely she was strong enough to present a steady front to the—was he friend or foe? She did not know why, but his eyes always seemed to her like danger signals. She felt she dare not let herself love him—yet was not that question already decided? At any rate a whole evening's *tête-à-tête* with him lay before her, and it was a fearful joy.

As she thought, her agitation diminished, her pulse grew more quiet, and she took up her book again, with the hope of acquitting herself like—a woman.

So engrossed was she in the effort to marshal her moral and mental forces that Palliser seemed to have been but a few minutes making his toilette, yet how perfect it was! What a distinguished-looking man—how his whole air and countenance bespoke frank pleasure—pleasure at seeing her, but Janet was quite herself again.

“And how is Captain Rowley?” asked Palliser, taking his stand on the hearth-rug. (Janet had subsided into a low arm-chair).

“Very well indeed.”

“Why did he not join you here?”

“I don’t know exactly, but I think he does not care to leave home when I am away. He is fond of working about the house and the garden, so——”

“Dinner is on the table,” announced the butler, opening the door wide.

Palliser offered his arm to his guest.

“I really have dined, Mr. Palliser,” said Janet, hesitating.

“What! would you treat me so scurvily as to let me eat alone?”

“Very well; I will come and look at you,” she returned smiling, and they descended the wide stairs together. How strange it seemed to her, yet the feeling of awkwardness was wearing off already.

Dinner was laid as usual when there were no guests, in the breakfast or morning room, and Janet saw with surprise how complete in

all respects was the repast so quickly prepared.

“And how have you amused yourself?” asked Palliser at last, having done most of the talking up to this question, and persuaded his companion to keep him in countenance by tasting some of the good things before her.

“I have been abundantly amused! There was that lovely library in the morning, till Lady Saville appeared, then we talked, and drove or walked, and my father came to luncheon sometimes, and I have been bold enough to ride, or try to ride, one of *your* horses — such a delightful horse. Lady Saville has been giving me lessons as to holding my reins, and many other things, then, in the evening she sang sometimes, and she has been so kind as to teach me how to play billiards. I find the game less tiresome than I expected!”

“Ah! I heard of the riding, but not of the billiard playing. If you are so disposed we’ll have a game after dinner.”

“Certainly, if you wish it,” said Janet with

some hesitation, "but I am afraid you will find me rather a bore. I am so unpractised."

"I shall find you an all-conquering antagonist," returned Palliser, covering the warmth of his tone with a laugh. "Come, Miss Rowley, you must drink one glass of Johannisberg with me, or I shall believe you are annoyed at my return."

"Why should I be? I am sure we—are very pleased to see you back."

"Really?" said Palliser, looking into her eyes as he filled her glass, which she scarcely tasted. Then he dexterously led the conversation to more impersonal topics, which was a relief to Janet. Presently she asked:

"How did you manage to arrive here when you did? There is no down train at Langford after six-thirty, and that would have brought you here before Lady Saville left."

"Exactly! I missed that train in London, so I took the four-twenty to Greybridge—you know that line is shorter—then I had a very tedious drive, nearly seven miles, you know, with the most miserable old brute of a horse

I ever sat behind. In fact, I was seized with an extraordinary fit of home-sickness, and was determined to reach the Hall to-night at any cost."

"Ah, yes; I understand! I am always glad to go home," said Janet in a low tone, not knowing exactly what to say.

There was a pause, then Palliser added: "You must remember that I have not known what home is for years."

Janet made no answer, every phrase that presented itself seeming unsuitable.

"Now," said her host in an altered voice, "shall we try our respective skill at billiards?—that is, if you will not take any more wine. Why, you have not finished what you have. I am afraid it is not good."

"I have no doubt it is excellent, but I do not like it very much. I rarely taste wine, and do not know good from bad. It has generally rather a disagreeable taste, I think."

"That is an unusual view of the matter! Come, Miss Rowley, I am anxious to see what you can do."

Ringling, he ordered the servant who came instantly, to light the billiard-room.

When Janet found herself in the well-appointed apartment, with her fascinating host chalking her cue, setting the balls and arranging all preliminaries with eager attention, her sense of humour—the contrast between her, her insignificance in the social gatherings at Langford, and her importance (even if temporary) in one of the first houses of the county, touched her fancy, and, catching Palliser's eye, she laughed—a low but merry laugh.

“What amuses you?” he asked.

“To be here, playing billiards with you, seems very funny!” she returned, smiles still dimpling round her lips.

Palliser paused in the act of making a stroke, and repeated “Funny! *I* find it heavenly!”

“Ah, Mr. Palliser, *that* is rather *too* much; please attend to your game.” She began to feel sufficiently at home with him to be a little coquettish.

“Believe me,” he said in a significant tone, “I *am* attending to my game very diligently.” Then he proceeded to explain and exemplify many mysteries, and seemed determined to keep away from any tempting subjects or allusions. Janet enjoyed her lesson extremely, growing more and more at her ease with him, and, therefore doing herself more justice. At last she looked at the clock.

“Half-past eleven!” she cried. “I had no idea it was so late. I must say good-night.”

“No, no, not yet; wait till my sister comes, and we shall hear some of the brilliant sayings exchanged at dinner”—then, coming round to lounge against the table beside her, “I think you have improved already under my tuition. If you care to play the game and *like* it, you may become a high-class player.”

“Thank you very much for your lesson; I should like to play well.”

“I will not say thank you for *your* lesson *yet*, Miss Rowley, until I know what result it

brings forth, but—you have taught me a great deal.”

“Then we are quits, I suppose?” said Janet, but her lips trembled as she said the words, and she wished to be away anywhere, even while a strange thrill of pleasure ran through her veins, when the door opened gently, and Lady Saville came in all smiles and diamonds.

Janet could have kissed her with joy.

“My dear Randal, this *is* an unexpected pleasure.”



CHAPTER VI.

AN IMPORTANT DECISION.

LADY SAVILLE was a good deal amused by the eagerness of Janet's welcome.

"Randal has not been keeping himself well in hand," she thought. "I wonder if he understands what a shy bird it is?"

Then she began to describe her evening at the Castle, and to ask questions respecting the party with which her brother had been staying in Norfolk.

Janet said little, and soon begged leave to retire.

"Miss Rowley has been dying to go to bed for the last hour," said Palliser, "though she has been playing splendidly! I only persuaded her to stay by suggesting the desirability of seeing you on your return."

"You know Janet has been accustomed

to early hours—we must not pale her roses by keeping her up! Good-night, dear! You shall hear the rest of the news to-morrow.”

“Good-night, Mr. Palliser—thank you for your lessons,” said Janet.

He opened the door for her and held her hand, perhaps an unnecessary instant, before she escaped. Then he returned to his sister and threw himself into a chair beside the fire, in silence.

“This is an unexpected move of yours, Randal!” said Lady Saville after waiting for him to speak.

“Yes!” he returned, “as unexpected to myself as to anyone else. Your letters have been very full and satisfactory, but this morning, I was seized with such an overpowering desire to come and see for myself, that—I came!”

“Randal, you amaze me!” she exclaimed with a touch of malice in her tone. “I thought your next marriage was to be arranged on the most prudential and hygienic principles, and behold——”

“Well, I think I have fulfilled all such conditions,” he interrupted. “If—friendly fate has thrown in a handful of sweeter ingredients — why, I think after my experience, I have a right to all the enjoyment I can get, but you are too bitter a sceptic!” he paused a moment and then continued, “I had a long talk with old Pearson about St. Oswald’s. I don’t think it will fetch as much as expected. He says if the place had been on the Devonshire Coast, I might have asked a higher price, and a lot more rot! However, he will do the best he can—I spoke about your house in E—— Square, he thinks it will let well for the season. I suppose you don’t care to let it before Christmas?”

Brother and sister talked at some length of their respective affairs, Palliser’s last words being :

“Send a note to Captain Rowley to-morrow early, ask him to dine and sleep, and have a little shooting on Thursday and Friday, if he will stay so long. He is a rugged old

fellow, but a gentleman and comes of a good stock."

* * * * *

If the days flew fast when Lady Saville and Janet were alone together, they went still faster when the master of the house was at home.

He undertook both the riding lessons, and the billiard lessons; in the former, Lady Saville joined.

Captain Rowley came to stay for two or three days, which were particularly delightful to Janet; she had never seen him so bright and even exhilarated; he seemed to enjoy his visit thoroughly, and Palliser's attentions and kindly care of him irresistibly attracted the daughter's heart.

The old man was very proud of his prowess in shooting, and Palliser was particular about having the birds forwarded to the Vicarage, labelled, "Shot by Captain Rowley." The old sailor himself was a little surprised at the number which bore this inscription.

The time was now close at hand when the

guests expected by Palliser were to assemble. Janet therefore made up her mind to return home with her father. He would feel terribly lonely too, after the brightness of his stay at the Hall.

Neither Lady Saville nor Palliser would hear of this.

“My dear child!” cried the former, when Janet suggested leaving on the following day, “what an idea! are you so faithless as to leave me during the last days of my stay here? I am sure, Captain Rowley, *you* will spare her to me for a week longer.”

“I don’t think I am likely to say you nay, Lady Saville!”

“But I am sure my father will feel being quite alone, after his delightful visit here,” and Janet glanced gratefully at Palliser. “I shall feel happier to be with him.”

“I am equally sure that Captain Rowley will be unselfish enough to bear his self-imposed loneliness, for a week,” said their host. “Why will he not give us another week himself?”

“Because I have stayed already four days instead of one, and I shouldn’t be surprised if I found my house burned down, or all the crockery smashed, when I go back! But you, Janet, you are welcome to stay! I know it’s a treat you don’t often get.”

“And,” added Palliser, “you require just six lessons more, to make you perfect in the ‘witching art of horsemanship.”

“Which art you will probably never exercise again! Nevertheless, learn all you can,” said Captain Rowley laughing.

After some further persuasion Janet agreed to remain.

In truth, she had never been so happy and at ease with Palliser as during her father’s visit to the Hall. She had rarely been alone with her host, and his manner to her had been more friendly and less that of an admirer. The result was that she looked forward with something like dismay to the time now so near at hand when she should no longer see him the first thing in the morning and the last at night.

How foolish she was! But there would be time enough to fight this matter out when she was at home and alone; for the present, let her, oh, let her enjoy!

The following day was wet and gusty. Palliser ordered the brougham, and accompanied Captain Rowley home himself.

Lady Saville and Janet were at tea in the smaller of the two drawing-rooms, and evening was fast closing in, when Palliser returned. To his great disgust he found Mrs. Richard Palliser, a plump, comely dame, and her daughter, established at his sister's tea-table. Mrs. R. Palliser was a somewhat irrepressible woman, perfectly satisfied with herself, her house, her husband, her position, and quite willing to be friendly with the Hall, in spite of the severe course of snubbing to which her husband's kinsman had treated her. She was busy explaining why she had not called on Lady Saville before.

"You see we went to Vichy immediately after you came, and then Minnie and I went on to Switzerland. Now we are going to

Yorkshire for a fortnight. In fact, my son is engaged to be married to a very charming girl—Miss Blackett who, besides being a sweet creature, has a very nice fortune.

“A fortune is always nice,” said Lady Saville blandly.

“That is just what I say,” returned Mrs. Palliser. “I am the last person in the world to set much value on wealth, still one must be glad when a young couple have a fair start.”

“No doubt,” observed Palliser, who managed to hold himself most politely aloof.

“I don’t suppose the marriage will come off before the new year,” etc., etc., etc.—she continued to babble on to Lady Saville.

Palliser took his cup and brought it over to Janet’s side, drawing a seat near her.

“Well,” he said in a low, caressing voice, “I saw ‘the dear Dad’ safely installed. I am glad to say the house is intact, also the crockery, as far as I could see. Your neat little damsel seemed very pleased to welcome her master back. Your father found quite a respectable lot of letters which will, no doubt,

occupy him this evening. By the way, he gave me one for you," taking it from his pocket and handing it to her.

"Oh, thank you. It is from Tom—from my brother," exclaimed Janet, smiling and colouring with the flitting blush which betrayed her emotional nature, Palliser thought, so delightfully.

"I am so much obliged to you for seeing dear Dad home."

"Are you?" said Palliser, looking into her eyes; "you are often good enough to say 'I am so much obliged to you!'—are you not afraid that you are storing up a terrible reckoning, and may beggar yourself when I demand repayment?"

"No, you are too generous for that," smiling upon him.

"Do not be too sure. Suppose I tell you what my demand will be?"

"Very well, only—no one can give more than they possess."

"No doubt we could come to terms," he returned, with a lingering glance, then

lowering his voice still more, he asked :
“How long is that dreadful woman going to stay ?”

“How can I tell ?” whispered Janet.
“Don’t you like her ?—*I* never did.”

“Glad to hear it ! Is that another secret ?”

Here the visitors rose to take leave.

“Are you staying here ?” asked the elder lady as she shook hands with Janet.

“I am.”

“I was going to ask if I could take you home—very nice for you, I am sure.”

“Quite delightful,” returned Janet joyously.

“Your father will feel very lonely without you.”

“He only left to-day, himself.”

“Oh, indeed ! Well, good morning, Mr. Palliser.”

“Allow me to see you to your carriage ?” he returned with icy politeness, and followed them from the room.

“Why does Mr. Palliser dislike Mrs. Richard so much ?” asked Janet, moving to a seat near Lady Saville.

“Do *you* like her?” was the counter question.

“No!—that is, it gives no pleasure to meet her, but Mr. Palliser seems to find her insupportable.”

“Randal is a good hater. Then the poor woman offends his taste, which is an unpardonable sin; besides, her husband is his next heir, and the son after him.”

“Does that annoy Mr. Palliser?”

“You know very little of my brother if you ask such a question,” returned Lady Saville laughing.

“Of course I scarcely know him,” said Janet thoughtfully. “Is he a complicated character?”

Lady Saville laughed again.

“I can hardly say—I only know he is a very good brother.”

“I am sure he is,” replied Janet, and then fell into deep thought. Yes, he was kind and generous, and quite fond of the dear “Dad.” How well he seemed to understand and appreciate him, and how dull life would be

without her delightful host when she returned to Navarino Cottage.

But the dear old father must see nothing of this when she did go back. At any rate, there were three or four days more of her present blissful life remaining, then Lady Saville was going, and there would be an end of all things——

“You are a very unguarded person, Randal,” Lady Saville was saying when Janet came out of “reverie-land.” “Janet has been asking me why you dislike the banker’s wife so much.”

“I should never dream of being guarded with Miss Rowley,” he returned; “besides, we have exchanged confidences, she does not fancy Mrs. ‘Ingot’ any more than I do. Do you think that young Richard’s fiancée is one of the Blacketts of Cliffe, Gertrude?” he continued, addressing his sister.

“Yes, I imagine she is.”

“Great luck for him!—I wonder if any hopes of the Mervyn property may have been used to bait the hook—eh?”

“ Oh, no—not now ! ”

Palliser stood meditatively leaning against the end of the mantel-piece for a moment, then he asked : “ Corbyn and old FitzHerbert are coming over to dinner, are they not ? ”

“ Yes, I asked them to stay the night, but dear old Fitz is starting for the ends of the earth to-morrow, so they must go back to Braybrook this evening.”

“ Ah ! ” returned her brother, “ if you have gauds, prepare to wear them now ! ”

“ Not ‘ *gauds*, ’ my dear Randal,” said Lady Seville laughing, “ severe simplicity would do better.”

“ You must know, Miss Rowley,” resumed Palliser, “ that Colonel FitzHerbert is the last of the dandies, the real old, full-flavoured dandy, who will swear you a sounding oath, and drink you a bottle of port, and who is moreover a past master—I should say—critic of beauty and style, and all the other thistle-down ingredients which go to make up social success. You must fascinate him, or you will lose caste for ever.”

“Now do not make her nervous and uncomfortable,” said Lady Saville. “Do not mind him, Janet.”

“I assure you I am not in the least uneasy, Lady Saville. I shall never see Colonel Fitz-Herbert again, probably, and his judgment does not concern me. I hope I may not give him an unpleasant shock. I will do my best not to offend his eyes or ears,” said Janet, laughing good-humouredly, “but I do not care for his verdict.”

“And you need not fear it,” said Palliser, thoughtfully, “your spirit will master his.”

“Well, I am tired and a little headachy—I rather think I have taken a chill. I will go and lie down,” put in Lady Saville.

“And I will come with you,” said Janet hastily, seeing her friend rise.

“And who will give me another cup of tea?” asked Palliser.

But Janet was at the door and passed through it before Lady Saville could answer.

“There,” she said, turning back with a

smile, and pouring out the desired cup, "you shall have this at least."

Palliser took it, looking rather blank as he did so, then with a laugh, remarked :

"Deferred does not mean defeated."

The two guests that evening were well-trained Society men; the younger was a landed proprietor in the neighbourhood, the elder a more than elderly gentleman, with a red face, a jet black wig, and whiskers, and a somewhat alarming range of very white teeth. He wore an eye-glass, and stared steadily at Janet, with an expression which seemed to say—"Where on earth have you come from?" But, "forewarned is forearmed," and Janet bore his scrutiny with great composure—moreover, she felt that Palliser was watching her, but in a fashion that gave her a sense of being potently backed up.

There was much talk at dinner which was Greek to her, some abstract good stories, however, were told, which she took in and enjoyed.

When the gentlemen joined Lady Saville

and her guest, the whole party adjourned to the billiard room, where Palliser asked Janet to play, but she whispered a request to be left out of the game, which resolved itself into a match between Lady Saville and Mr. Corbyn, the host marking.

Presently the Colonel approached her.

“Are you from Lancashire?” he asked. “I knew some Rowleys in that part of the world.”

“Yes—my father’s family are Lancashire people!”

“I remember knowing a young fellow of that name, who was second lieutenant of the troop-ship that took my regiment out to Bombay, in eighteen hundred and—No! by George, I won’t give you chapter and verse.”

“Then will you give me the name of the ship?” said Janet, and she looked with a bright smile into the old beau’s eyes.

“Not easy to say *you* No! Let me see, it was the *Golconda*.”

“Then it *was* my father!” she exclaimed with sudden interest. “I know he served on board that ship.”

“Small place this world! I suppose Rowley has left the service like myself. What is he doing now?”

“We live here—in Langford I mean—he is very well and still quite active!”

“Ha! and looks years younger than I do—hey?”

“Oh, no!” returned Janet, gazing at his abundant wig, and the generally “florid Gothic” of his appearance. “He is not a bit like you! Then you must remember he has a great daughter to take care of.”

“Gad! you ought to grind him young if anything would! How is it I have never seen you in Town? Not been presented yet?”

“No—not yet!” returned Janet, shaking her head solemnly.

“What! He keeps you mewed up—what an infernal shame! If I were staying on here, I’d call on him and remonstrate, by Jove I would! You get our little friend Lady Saville to present you next spring—couldn’t have a better social sponsor! Hey, l’alliser! I’m going to depute *you* to act for

me, and read my old acquaintance Rowley a lecture on the iniquity of his conduct in shutting up his daughter," etc., etc., and the talk flowed into other channels, until the visitors took their leave.

"Deuced fine girl that daughter of Rowley's—a gentlewoman too, so quiet and self-possessed, she has a look of her great grand aunt—yes, it must be a great aunt—the Marchioness of Pennywern; never made out why Rowley didn't get pushed up, he ought to have had interest, but he was just the sort of man to hide his light under a bushel. I remember him well, some—that is, a good many years ago—but have lost sight of him for ages—made a love match, and bedevilled himself!" thus Colonel Fitzherbert to his host, on the doorstep.

"Come, Fitzherbert," cried his companion. "It's too cold to discuss Rowley's life and adventures to-night; if you keep the mare much longer waiting, she'll kick us into 'kingdom come.'" The guests therefore lit up, mounted their dog-cart and drove off.

“There is a decided touch of frost to-night,” said Palliser, returning to the warm, well-lit drawing-room where his sister and Janet stood by the fire. “I am afraid we are going to have a spell of hard weather, still I suppose we shall manage a run to-morrow. Miss Rowley, I congratulate you on your subjugation of the Arch Judge! Old Fitz says—but I will spare your blushes, and only say that he observes a striking resemblance to a certain Marchioness of Pennywern—some relative of yours.”

“How could he possibly know?” cried Janet in great surprise. “There is a miniature of her at home. You would be amused at the idea of its being like *me*!”

“You must show it to me some day!”

“But is it not curious that he should have known my father?”

“No, not at all! In a society like ours, everybody is likely to know everybody.”

Then they exchanged good nights, for Lady Saville was very tired, and Palliser got a book, and lounged long, cigar in mouth, over

his dressing-room fire, but he did not read much.

The next day was splendidly fine, clear and frosty, yet not so frosty as to interfere with the projected run. The meet was at some distance, and as Lady Saville sent Janet a message that she should not get up till late, that young lady did not descend to the breakfast-room until the sound of horse's feet dying away told her the hunter had departed.

It was rather a long forenoon. Lady Saville seemed very unwell, though more depressed in spirits than physically affected. She evidently wished to be left alone, so Janet took the day into her own hands, mended a little, played a little, dreamed over a fresh magazine, and about three o'clock went out for a solitary ramble, during which she did some self-examination and made a small cairn of good resolutions.

Evening was fast closing in when she reached the house.

"If you please, 'm," said the butler, whom

she met in the hall, "Mr. Palliser desired me to say that tea was ready in the library."

"And Lady Saville! Is she better—is she downstairs?"

"No, 'm, her Ladyship is still in her room, her cold is very severe." Janet went into her favourite haunt. It was unoccupied, she removed her hat and cloak, and took a cup of tea. "I suppose Mr. Palliser has had a long run, and has gone to dress, and rest till dinner," she thought, so she took a book and curling herself up in the corner of a luxurious sofa beside a glowing fire, the light from which caught the golden gleams in her sunny hair and flickered on the arch of her white neck, as she bent over her book; she read on for a while, till a sudden sense of someone near made her look up, to find Palliser standing beside her. He seemed even taller and more distinguished than ever in his braided smoking jacket.

"I did not hear you come in," exclaimed Janet, putting down her book.

"No, I stole in like a thief in the night!"

“How does Lady Saville seem?”

“No great things. She is up, but will not leave her room. I have been sitting with her.”

A pause. Janet felt strangely at a loss what to say.

“Have you had tea?”

“Thank you, yes.”

Palliser rang, and ordered the tea to be removed.

“I ought not to have put off my hat and cloak *here*!” she said apologetically. “I will take them away.” And she rose as if to go.

“What can it possibly matter?” exclaimed Palliser. “And why do you invariably escape, or try to escape, when I want to talk to you? I did not think I was a disagreeable fellow!”

“But indeed you are *not*!” eagerly, then with a little more caution, “Everyone thinks you agreeable.”

“Then, pray sit down, and let us discuss matters and things in general.” And he placed himself beside her.

There was a short pause, during which

Janet resolved to be very collected and argumentative.

“What profound subject are you studying now?” asked Palliser, opening her book. “Blackwood? Oh, this is merely light literature to *you*.”

“Ah! Mr. Palliser, you laugh at me, but I really enjoy——”

“Laugh!” he interrupted. “Do you believe I ever laugh at what interests you? You are very much mistaken. Women as truthful and natural as *you*, are *never* laughed at!—that is why I like to talk to you, to look into your eyes, because whatever your lips or eyes tell me I feel I can trust. You do not know what a fresh—what a delightful sensation this is to me! But your eyes tell me very little—you are so chary of your glances—that is one reason why I always seek you, though you do your best to avoid me. Do you know what the other reason is?”

Janet, who was now almost past words, shook her head.

Palliser drew nearer, and resting his arm

on the back of the sofa, leant his head on his hand, and looked at her intently for an instant, then he said in a low tone and very deliberately :

“Because I love you!—love you as you have yet no conception of loving! May I try to teach you? I will give my life to the task!”

There was a moment's silence. Janet was trembling all over, far more uneasy than delighted.

“Will you speak to me?” whispered Palliser.

“I cannot,” said Janet at last, clasping her hands together, and turning her face towards him, though with downcast eyes. “It seems so impossible!”

“What—that I should love you, sweet one? Nothing in the world was ever more likely! You *must* have known I loved you—you must have *felt* that the words I have just spoken have been on my lips a dozen times, though I held them back, fearing to startle you prematurely. Now, tell me—what chance have

I? I know it is a great deal to ask, but *will* you give me *yourself*? Will you—can you love me?”

This was so solemn a question that it steadied Janet's nerves, and with sudden composure she lifted her eyes to his, saying :

“I will try to be true—indeed, I am not sure! It disturbs me strangely when I see you, but when I think of *not* seeing you—I—I do not like the idea! I wish you were not so grand and rich! I wish I had something to bring with me!” and she clasped her hands; Palliser caught them in his own and kissed them passionately.

“You tell me more than I hoped for,” he exclaimed. “Say you will give yourself to me—that you will be my wife, and let me win the love you have not quite given me yet! My love, your father likes me, I am sure he will not object to me!”

“Ah! yes, you are so nice and pleasant to him that——”

“You will love me for his sake?” put in Palliser smiling.

“I will love you for your own,” she returned, with an inexpressible tone of gentle dignity, that touched and calmed her lover.

“My darling, you are infinitely good! I will not be unworthy of your affection, and Janet, you *do* love me—a little?”

She looked at him, laughed, blushed, shook her head, and found herself in his arms, held closely to his heart, while his lips clung to her sweet, fresh mouth, as if they could never tear themselves away.

Yet he soon let her go, when he felt how wildly her heart beat, he feared to agitate her more.

“You are so sensitive, so timid, with all your pluck, Janet, that I dread offending or alarming you! Sit down beside me again”—for she had risen in her confusion—“let us talk of our plans—or rather mine. Let me hold your hand—I ask no more now.”

And then ensued a long, rambling conversation, chiefly on Palliser’s side, half-reminiscent, half-prospective, during which

Janet learned how soon Palliser had been attracted to her, and how long his probation had seemed to him, as he had feared to spoil his own game by too early a declaration.

How sweet was all this folly. Let philosophy and worldliness sneer and shrug—grant it is even beneath the contempt of ordinary common sense—can any of the three give a glimpse of that exquisite fleeting heaven—that temporary paradise of tenderness and mutual understanding which the first avowal of reciprocal love creates? It may be evanescent, but the life that has not known this gleam of “a light that was never on land or sea” is poor indeed!

“But, Mr. Palliser, it is almost dinner-time,” remonstrated Janet at last, “and I should like to see Lady Saville.”

“By all means. She will be anxious to know the result of our interview.”

“Why?”

“Because,” he said, laughing, “she has been my confidante all through. Don’t you know my name yet, my darling? I shall

never answer to ‘ Mr. Palliser ’ from your lips again.”

“ ‘ Mr. Palliser ’ comes more readily to me, but I will *try* to remember—Randal ! ” The word was held back till she was passing through the door.



CHAPTER VII.

WEDDING BELLS.

THE days which followed left a curious impression upon Janet's mind. A kind of glittering confusion through which she seemed passing into a new state of being.

It was very wonderful to be welcomed and caressed as a new sister by so elegant and distinguished a woman as Lady Saville, and gently chaffed respecting the glamour she had exercised over Palliser! Yet, although she never offended against good taste, it seemed to Janet that Lady Saville hardly treated the solemn subject of impending marriage with sufficient gravity.

To Janet it was inexpressibly serious and touching. Palliser seemed to her the noblest and most chivalrous of men, and all she asked was to prove herself worthy of his

affection, for the indefinite admiration of him, which had thrilled her with a strange mixture of pleasure and unrest, had now settled into a kind of proud devotion, even while his passionately-expressed love for herself made repose impossible.

Their *tête-à-tête* dinner (for Lady Saville could not or would not join them), had been a tremendous trial; though Janet did her best to be tranquil and composed when Edwards, the superior butler, offered her Chablis—or James, the accomplished footman, brought her oyster patties, she felt that both were perfectly aware she had just promised to marry their master, and had permitted him to kiss her on the strength of their engagement!

Then, although Palliser made a gallant and successful attempt to talk about general topics, he could not keep from a happy smile, or laugh, when he met her eyes, a confession of his own effort to keep up appearances before the servants. When dinner was over, there was a delightful interval of unrestrained talk in the drawing-room, during which Janet

began to feel herself a little more accustomed to her position, and Palliser put a fine diamond and sapphire engagement ring on her slender finger.

“Do you think Lady Saville has gone to bed ?” asked Janet at last.

“Yes, I do ! She said she would, and I know she wants to be all right to-morrow, there will be a good deal to do. I wish to Heaven I had not asked those fellows, who are coming next week ! They will be hideously in the way, but I cannot put them off, and as I have asked them in relays, it will be quite ten days or a fortnight before the place is clear of them ; and all that time, I can only see you by snatches, for I think it better not to announce our engagement till I am free of my guests.”

“Yes, much better,” said Janet, “and, Mr. — I mean Randal — I should like to go home to-morrow ! I do long to be with my dear father, and to hear what he will say !” There was a slight catch in her voice as she said this.

“Yes, sweet one!” returned Palliser, taking her hand in both his, and kissing it. “I understand what you feel, and I will not be so selfish as to try to keep you; but as to what your good father will say, I can tell you! When I went home with him yesterday, I told him my aspirations, my love for you, and asked his consent, if I should be so fortunate as to obtain yours. I am glad to say that *he* is ready to accept me as a son if you are willing to present me in that character.”

“How good and thoughtful you are!” cried Janet, returning the pressure of his hand, with a franker show of affection than she had yet evinced. “I am so glad the dear old father knows!”

“And, if you will pardon the apparent conceit, he seems quite pleased.”

“I am sure he is, he always liked you—Randal.”

“Ah! you are kind, my darling, to think of my name. How sweet it is to hear you say it,” etc., etc., etc.

At length Janet insisted on bidding him good-night.

“And when you have talked with Captain Rowley, I have one or two petitions to offer, which you must not refuse, my darling!” were his last words that night.

“I don’t suppose I shall!” she returned with a sweet bright smile.

The next morning Janet spent a good deal of time with Lady Saville, who seemed to her weak and low. She was very kind and sympathetic, however, though her slightly depressed tone rather dulled the glitter of Janet’s brand new happiness.

They parted with many expressions of regard, for Lady Saville meant to leave for Aldershot the following day.

Janet was more overcome than she liked to show, when she reached her modest home, where she found her father evidently expecting her. The thought that soon it would be hers no longer, flashed upon her with sudden force, fancy depicting the dear old man sitting alone, through the long

winter's evening, pining for his hit of backgammon, and going off an hour too early to bed because he could not keep his eyes open. She could hardly hold back the tears. How ardently she wished she had not to marry Mervyn Hall as well as Randal Palliser, but she was silent on many subjects, fearing Randal might be offended.

He soon showed that he perceived her emotion, a tender hand pressure assured her of his sympathy, and had they been alone she might have testified her gratitude with a degree of warmth he could not have anticipated.

After a short visit he took his leave, saying with his pleasant smile, as he shook hands warmly with his intended father-in-law :

"I know Janet is dying to see me depart, that she may open her heart to you !"

"Yes !" she returned with shy warmth, "but I want you to come to-morrow !"

With what a mixture of pleasure and tenderness she threw herself into the old man's arms, and kissed him over and over

again with tears, much to the excellent Captain's surprise, for a good deal of Janet's finer feelings were incomprehensible to him.

"What's the matter, my girl? You are not sorry you've promised to marry Palliser? You'd be hard to please if you don't like a fine fellow like him! He might take any woman's fancy, and a thorough gentleman into the bargain. I have always been an old fool about you, my pet, and thought no man would be good enough for you, but, by George! I believe Palliser is!"

"No, no, dearest Dad! I am very fond of him and pleased to marry him, but what—what *will* you do without me, Dad?"

"Do! I'll do right well!" stroking her head, while his voice was slightly unsteady. "I'll come and see you and dine with you if I get hipped, and Janet, child, don't you think, that knowing you are safe in a beautiful house, with a good husband to take care of you through the troubles of life, will be a real joy and comfort to me? And you will be a credit to me, my pet!"

Janet gradually perceived that her projected marriage was a source of pride and pleasure to her father, and whatever effect her absence might produce, the outlook at present was certainly cheerful.

This did more to restore her equanimity than anything else. Captain Rowley was not at all superior to the exultation naturally consequent on the prospect of seeing his daughter at the head of one of the finest establishments in the county, with a really "fine gentleman," in the best sense, for a husband. Where would the Richard Pallisers be now, who never asked him or his daughter to their grand ball last spring, or old Lady Melesina Jones, who patronised them in such a palpable manner? He could venture to expend some of his hard savings in furthering Tom's fortunes now that Janet, the delight of his eyes, was to be so amply provided for. The old sailor grew quite jovial over his dinner, and even took a second glass of port before that meal was over, and Janet began to think herself unnecessarily sentimental.

Finally, her father chaffed her with much glee for her inattention to their game of backgammon, which she took in excellent part, occasionally stroking her father's wrinkled hand as it grasped the dice-box.

"Dad dear," she said, when they had shut up the board and were about to bid good-night, "shall you be going out early to-morrow?"

"Yes, my dear, I want to get in a few things, probably Palliser will stay to dinner."

"Then will you turn in to the Vicarage and ask Mary to come and see——"

"You want to tell her the news?" interrupted her father.

"Yes."

"Then don't, my pet. Both Palliser and I have agreed that we'll keep everything 'mum' and quiet till he has got rid of his party, and then the sooner everything is finished off the better."

"But Mary would be as prudent and silent as possible; we have been such close friends. It would seem unkind, disloyal, to keep her in the dark like——"

“Stuff and nonsense, my dear! No girl is prudent or silent when there’s a marriage in the air! No, no, Janet! Promise me that you will not drop a hint to *any* one! It would be a devil of a bore if a whisper of the business got about—you’d have no peace of your life nor I either. Besides, Palliser wants the affair announced and carried through at once, and he is quite right! You know, poor fellow, after the mess he made of it to begin with, he does not want to give the gossips too long a tether! He’ll explain all he wants to you, and plead his own cause a deuced deal better than I can; but I hope you’ll show yourself a straightforward, sensible girl and no prude. He’ll think all the more of you, and so will I—no, don’t talk any more, go to your bed and sleep, you look a little pale and done up, and not a word to man, woman or child till I can announce the engagement all over the place. God bless you, my pet! Shut up your eyes fast, and don’t lie awake thinking.”

Janet felt there was nothing for it but to obey, so far as going to her room went, but

sleep would not come when called. She lay long awake, much exercised in her mind respecting her enforced reserve with Mary, who was so good and true. How could she see her every day and yet deceive her? Still, her father's and Palliser's wishes were all powerful with Janet, and indeed she shrank from drawing down the full storm of observation, conjecture and congratulation upon herself an hour too soon. Finally, had her father and Palliser determined that the marriage was to take place soon—very soon? This startling proposition she considered from every point of view. It was less startling the more she looked at it. Janet was especially domestic, she looked forward to settling down into a calmer every-day life when Palliser and herself were united, belonging to each other in the eyes of the whole world, sharing the same home, and duties, and cares; then she would be composed and at rest, and undisturbed by the strange quivering thrills of almost fearful pleasure which agitated her whenever she found herself alone with Palliser.

Her uneasiness respecting Mary Winyard was somewhat allayed by a visit from that dear friend early next morning. She was looking bright and very pleased, exercise had given her a colour and made her almost pretty, for Mary was rather a plain likeness of her brother.

“I am absolutely going away for a month, Janet!” was her greeting. “Mother’s cousin, Mrs. Compton, at Sidmouth, has asked me to pay them a visit, and I am to go immediately—on Saturday, if possible—so I cannot make much preparation. I am so glad to have a quiet talk with you before I go. What a long time you stayed at the Hall! How long has Mr. Palliser been back—about a week? Isn’t Lady Saville nice? Had you many parties?”

And the two girls plunged into the usual kind of gossip. Mary being so taken up with the sudden break in the monotony of her life, that she did not notice how little of the conversation fell to Janet’s share.

“You will look after my poor people for

me, will you not, Janet? And oh, do try to look in and have a little talk with mother every day, if possible. Mother is so fond of you, you cheer her up—though Eva is quite able to take my place now.”

“I will, dear, as often as I can—but I may go away for a while myself,” returned Janet, with a sound of tears in her voice.

“What! are you going to London again?—you lucky girl!” exclaimed Mary. “I hope you will not go till I come back. Why, Janet, what’s the matter? You don’t seem to like the idea—are you not quite well?”

Janet assured her she never felt better, and added with an arch smile that she *did* like the idea of going to London. Then Mary departed, overwhelmed with the sense of all she had to do before Saturday.

* * * * *

Lady Saville was not quite well enough to start the day she intended, Palliser therefore begged Janet and her father to come over to the Hall for a consultation about future plans

when, as might have been expected, he had his own way on most points.

Janet soon saw that everything had been carefully arranged, and that her father had been taken into the council.

“You see, my dear Janet,” urged Lady Saville, with whom she had a long *tête-à-tête* talk, while Palliser and her father took a walk to the home farm, “it will be much wiser to get through the whole business as soon as possible. Randal will know no peace, nor give any one else any peace till he is married, and you would be bored to death with the people here. Believe me, you will be much happier when you are settled. I think you and your father had better come and stay with me; we can make all the preparations so much better in Town, and there will be a great deal to do! Randal can come to and fro, or put up at the Club Chambers—he hasn’t a Town house.”

In short everything had been thought of and settled, and Janet agreeing with their views in their common-sense aspect, and only

held back by a sort of nervous reluctance to break so suddenly with the old life, seeing that her father was strongly on Palliser's side, was carried irresistibly on the stream, and it was decided *nem. con.* that as soon as Captain Rowley could conveniently leave home he and Janet should take up their abode in Eaton Square, and remain there till the marriage, which was to take place as early in December as could be managed.

Then at Palliser's request, Lady Saville gave her a history of his first unfortunate marriage.

"He said he could not bear the humiliation of recounting it himself. It has been a most unfortunate business for him, poor fellow. He has been so awfully ashamed of having made such a fool of himself—the ridicule has hurt him more than anything—he is very sensitive and proud. He went away round the world after that. He need not have gone so far—in a fortnight society had forgotten all about his misfortunes, and had thrown itself on some one else's. Now I fancy he

would like to stay abroad most of the winter for the same reason—of course, when his marriage is announced there will be a fresh outbreak of talk, perhaps you might like to come back sooner.”

“Oh, no, I shall be charmed to travel about—I always wished to see the places I have read of.”

“That is all very well, my dear child, but *do* cultivate tastes and a will of your own! Don’t fancy that your husband will think a bit the better of you, or care for you any better because you adopt *his* ideas and give in to him in everything. They like the excitement of opposition, and the necessity for bringing a wife round to his opinions gives her importance in a man’s eyes. I made terrible mistakes at first, and went on making mistakes until it was too late to mend!”

“But dear Lady Saville, if two people love and understand each other, all these small matters will arrange themselves.”

“My dear, ‘love and understanding’ never

affect the everlasting struggle for the upper hand between men and women, or rather between human beings."

"Still," exclaimed Janet with a sunny smile, "I do not think Randal and I will find much to quarrel about—I should be an ungrateful wretch if I were to vex him."

"For Heaven's sake, Janet, do not let any absurd notions about gratitude take root in your mind, they will ruin you! You have nothing to be so grateful for—you have made yourself indispensable to Randal, and he is ready to pay any price to secure you. He is in many ways a good fellow, but like every man that ever was born, he wants management! However, I see you do not heed me, so—to return to our muttons, try to come up to me as soon as possible. It would be so much better for you to be away during this tiresome party of Randal's, and we could be getting on with the trousseau."

"Ah, yes—the trousseau!" murmured Janet, her speaking face changing somewhat. "Is it necessary to have a very large one?"

“By no means. Just enough to go on with, then, when you are Mrs. Palliser with a proper allowance of pin money, you can get everything you want.”

Janet knew that her father could not give her a fine trousseau, and she shrank from the idea of receiving anything from Palliser before she was his wife, still it must be managed somehow! Yes, she was very glad to go away from the prying gossips of Langford, only she would like the dear Vicar to marry her!

Though Captain Rowley had sternly enjoined silence and prudence on his daughter, he profoundly enjoyed announcing Janet's engagement to the Squire of Mervyn Hall, when the time came, and the astonishment which consequently fell on Langford, genteel Langford!

Janet insisted on telling Mrs. Winyard herself. That much-enduring woman was greatly affected by the news—she even shed a few tears, and solemnly blessed her young favourite, but she did not mention her son's

name. Janet well knew, however, that he was in her thoughts, and this made her all the more ready to go away. It was a great relief to quit Langford, especially as she knew she was coming back there to her permanent home.

“And when we meet again,” said Palliser, as he leaned against the door of the railway carriage, waiting for the guard’s signal to start, “when we meet again, my darling, we shall have no more parting. You will write to me every day, as I will to you? I think we are going to have some fine open weather—I hope so! Hunting will help the time to pass more quickly——”

Here the guard’s whistle rang out, and Palliser stepped back. Then they sped away and were soon beyond the limit of Janet’s farthest rambles—she felt as if she had already left her old life far behind, and bade it a tender, but not reluctant adieu.

Lady Saville was waiting to receive them at Paddington, and welcomed them with the graceful warmth she knew so well how to

adopt, then the visitors, their wraps and small bags, with a huge basket of fruit and flowers from the Hall, were swept away in a comfortable double brougham to Lady Saville's town house.

Their kind hostess had invited Tom Rowley to meet his father and sister at dinner, and as he came punctually she stayed a few minutes longer over her "toilette," in order to let the family meeting take place without her presence.

Tom was an unlike likeness of his father—he was short and broad and sandy, but his expression had a touch of foxiness, and his eyes were lighter and less kindly than Captain Rowley's. He was much absorbed in his work and very eager to get on. His sister's grand marriage was a great joy to him; though fairly straight and independent, he did not see why he should not get some personal good out of it—anyhow he would try.

Janet was really glad to see him, but a little disgusted with herself for feeling rather

disappointed at his appearance. They had not met for more than a year, and either he had deteriorated, or she had grown hypercritical, but though well-dressed in the evening clothes of everyday humanity, he did not look quite a gentleman. His movements, his attitudes, his voice had in them something indescribable which displeased her; to be sure, she could not expect everyone to be distinguished like Randal—no one *was* quite equal to him, and Tom, poor boy! had not had many advantages.

“Well, madam Janet,” he exclaimed when the first greetings were exchanged, “*you* have done well for yourself! I suppose you’ll be a regular swell, too fine for your own people?”

“Oh, Tom!” she was beginning, when Lady Saville came in, and Tom sank into silence, speaking very little during his stay, but evidently appreciating the good things set before him. In fact, he had few subjects in common with his convives, and did not feel quite comfortable with Lady Saville,

who, though exquisitely polite, seemed a little puzzled with him.

When he had drunk a little wine, he came out more and mentioned the leading facts of a rather curious case in which his firm was engaged, using a good many technical terms. Then he invited his father to dine with him at his "diggin's" next day, and Janet was on the whole rather glad when he was gone.

"Janet, my dear," said Lady Saville next morning, "we must be up and doing! I am going to carry her off, Captain Rowley, to my own particular *modiste*, who has promised to devote all the resources of her establishment to our service. I want to get as much as possible accomplished before Randal comes up to Town. We shall find him a great hindrance! Go and dress, dear, I shall give you a sketch of our proposed proceedings as we drive to Bond Street."

"Very well, Lady Saville, I am most thankful to you for this help. I really do not know what I should do without you!"

As soon as Janet had left the room,

Captain Rowley rose, and drawing a note-book from his breast pocket, said with some solemnity, "My daughter is right, you are a sister and a mother to her in one; but it is enough that you take all this trouble for us! I don't want you or anyone else to be put to any expense. I'm not a rich man, but my girl must not be indebted to anyone for her wedding gown!" Here he opened the book and took out an envelope. "There," he continued, handing it to Lady Saville, "you'll find five twenty-pound notes in that, and I fancy they'll buy fallals enough for a princess! Your taste and judgment will dispose of them to the best advantage."

"Thank you, my dear Captain Rowley, you are most considerate and generous! I shall see that Janet has everything she requires," returned Lady Saville with a sweet smile, and greatly amused at the self-satisfied important air of the simple old sailor, as he made this magnificent provision for his daughter's needs.

In the disposal of this handsome sum, Lady

Saville contrived to endow it with such extraordinary elasticity, that Captain Rowley was excited to swear some almost forgotten sea-going oaths, expressive of surprise at the amount of money's worth she managed to get for it.

As to Janet, she was quite dazed by the quantity of clothes considered absolutely necessary by Lady Saville.

Morning dresses, walking dresses, carriage dresses, evening dresses, tea gowns, morning gowns, dressing gowns, then the heaps of dainty lace-trimmed under garments, the boots and the shoes, the gloves and the ribbons—Lady Saville wanted to order all and everything.

Here Janet stood firm.

“It is absolutely sinful to order such piles of things,” she said. “I should be obliged to change my dress every hour of the day, to use even the half of them! Then fashions change, and I shall want different shapes and stuffs, which I can buy for myself, as I am to have such a large dress allowance! Of

course, poor Dad's hundred pounds can go but a very short way, and—and I want to pay all the rest myself a little later—that is——”

“My dear Janet! If you intend to waste your allowance in that way, I am sorry for you, you will bitterly regret such Quixotism! Randal would be furious if you dressed in a dowdy, economical way.”

“Still, Lady Saville, I will *not* have all these dresses, at all events until I understand better what I want; and travelling about I shall not need more than one or two evening dresses. As to having all these boots and shoes made, it is rather waste of time. Why not get them ready made?”

“Good Heavens, Janet! would you ruin your feet? Would you really *wear* such things?”

“I have worn them all my life, and I do not think my feet are ruined yet.”

At last Palliser, having got rid of his guests, came to Town, and Janet found herself torn between his demands on her time, and those

of the *modiste* and her myrmidons. There was one tremendous evening of excitement, both to Captain Rowley and Lady Saville, when the Palliser family diamonds and other jewels were brought up in charge of one of the clerks from the bank, and tried on the fair *fiancée*.

"They are rather old-fashioned," said Palliser, contemplating her critically. "I think I shall have them reset while we are abroad. They would be ready in time for your presentation, Janet!"

"Oh! dear Randal, they are lovely as they are."

And an animated discussion ensued in which Janet carried her point.

"Really our *ingénue* is singularly indifferent to the unwonted grandeur with which you load her, Randal!" said his sister, when Janet, quite tired out with the rush and strain of the day, had gone to her room.

"She has the instincts of a gentlewoman, and they lift her over a vulgar delight in finery. Besides," with a smile of undisguised

self-satisfaction, "I flatter myself she is too much taken up with *me*, to care much about my belongings."

"She is certainly very fond of you," returned Lady Saville.

"I hope so, and I am glad she is much more at home with me. At first she was half afraid of me, or of her own feelings! It was heavenly, but it would have become deucedly inconvenient later."

When the day of days in a woman's life dawned at last, Janet was thankful that the hurry and high pressure were over, and that repose and a return to something like her normal existence was now within touch.

She had her wish. The vicar came up to Town the day before to perform the ceremony. The faithful Mary, however, refused to be bridesmaid, albeit pressed warmly. Her heart was with her absent brother, though she felt she had no right to be angry with Janet.

The bride, therefore, went unattended to the altar, and her father could hardly believe

that the stately, splendidly-attired young creature who stood before him, was his own light-hearted, industrious Janet.

The whole thing was soon over, the wedding was almost private as regards the limited number present, and then Janet seemed to be clothed in her travelling dress with magic celerity, by her new maid, a severe, desperately-experienced elderly widow, of whom her mistress was slightly in awe. In another minute she was clinging to her father with tears and kisses, till her husband gently drew her away. "It is only for a time, dearest, we shall both be with him soon again."

"And he shall stay awhile with me, dear! We'll have a grand time together," put in Lady Saville.

Then Palliser hurried her into the carriage, and so Janet Rowley passed away.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DAILY ROUND.

It was at the end of March that our bride and bridegroom found themselves again in Paris on their homeward way.

Those three months had been rich in experience of many kinds for Janet. After a short stay at Cannes, they had pursued their way to Rome, where they had made many acquaintances, or rather Janet had, for it seemed to her that her husband knew every one in the world already. She had been greatly amused with the people, and profoundly interested in the place. Indeed, as Palliser observed, she had developed a forty-horse power of sight seeing. He was a little bored, a not unusual mental condition with him. He was still very passionately in love, and he wanted to have his wife all to

himself ; nor was she less enchanted to be alone with him, only when she was *not*, she could amuse herself very cheerfully. Palliser, though too lazy to care about the society in Rome, was pleased to see how well and successfully Janet posed as Mrs. Palliser of Mervyn Hall. He thought this was the result of some wonderful reserve fund of tact, which he did not dream she possessed, whereas it was the outcome of happiness, the certainty of her position, and the insight of a quick intelligence, not of any forethought or worldly wisdom. Her common sense always prompted her to ask her husband his opinion of the various people introduced to her, as she was keenly alive to her own inexperience, and she thus ascertained his estimate of others, and the terms on which he wished to stand with them.

“You are a wonderfully shrewd little woman, Janet!” he sometimes said to her with lazy admiration. “The way you pick my brains is quite extraordinary, but you are right to take me for your pilot.”

So all things went well and smoothly, and in this world of grief and trial, sorrow and disappointment, there was one supremely happy creature, for whom the past had no secrets, the future no fears, who, when she stopped to think, was even a little awed by her own bliss.

“What are you going to do this morning, Randal?” she asked one fine mild day, more like the end of April than of March.

“I don’t know exactly—I thought of going over to the Embassy to see Dacre. He wants me to look at a horse at Beauregard’s stables—he thinks of buying it, they say it’s a pure Arab.”

“Very well!” said Janet turning from the window, which looked out on the Tuileries gardens, and coming over to the fireplace where her husband was lounging, his shoulder against the mantelshelf. “Then I shall go to poor Marie Antoinette’s prison. I have wished so much to see it—these sort of places bore *you*, as you have seen everything.”

"No, not everything, Janet! You cannot go alone?"

"I shall take Raynes with me, she can speak French fairly well, and seems always to know what to do."

"You are getting on with Mrs. Raynes!" said Palliser, taking the ends of the long sash which fastened his wife's morning gown and twisting them together indolently. "I thought you were a little in awe of her?"

"Oh! I fear no one when *you* are behind me," slipping her arm through his and pressing it to her side. "Then I have grown accustomed to her, and she to me. I think she is rather fond of me."

"Impossible! she is much too severe a British Matron to be fond of anything or anyone! At all events, she seems to know her business. Your hair is very well done up?"

"I am glad you like it! But it is my own doing, I always do it myself in the morning."

"I believe you have an abstract love of taking trouble?"

“There is something else I want to speak to you about. First, how long are we to stay here?” continued Janet.

“I am not sure, I rather want to see Lord L—— who will be passing through in a fortnight.” (He named a well-known Conservative statesman). “Shall we stay till the last week in April?”

“How lovely the woods will be looking!” she exclaimed. “But if we are to stay so long I should like to take some French lessons. I cannot speak nearly as well as Raynes, and last night I scarcely understood anything Sarah Bernhardt said.”

“And what am I to do when you are absorbed in profound study?”

“Well, Randal, I like to get up early, and you are rather lazy, so if I get up an hour or two earlier, I should be quite ready to walk or drive with you when you wanted me.”

“Where shall you find a teacher? I don’t want you to have a hairy grinning ape of a French *master*!”

Janet laughed.

"Mrs. Dacre knows a very accomplished French *mistress*, *diplômée* and all that!"

"Very well! only you must not desert *me*!"

"I had a delightful long letter from my father this morning. He seems quite well and bright, and longing to see us again. Would you like to read it?"

"Thanks, dearest! you can tell me all about it! By the way, my lawyers write that the man who has made an offer for that place of mine in Sussex, is Dick Palliser. He offers a very fair price too! Well, he is welcome to it on those terms. But I trust he will never set his foot in Mervyn Hall."

"My father says he is to be married on the twenty-ninth, and is going to leave the army!"

"More fool he! his only chance of distinction was to stick to his profession. Hullo! that is eleven striking. I had better be off. I promised to breakfast with Dacre

if I could. You'll take care of yourself then?" He held her to him for a parting kiss and was gone.

Soon after, Mrs. Palliser and her maid set out for the gloomy portals of the Conciergerie. Janet rather wished that her husband could share the keen interest with which she examined historic sites, and places hallowed by tradition, for every pleasure shared by him was doubled or trebled. She could not help perceiving that in these directions what engrossed her, was weariness to him. To matters connected with hunting or racing he was all alive, but when, anxious to know his opinion, and guide herself by his judgment, she tried to discuss characters and events of the past, he only chaffed her for her earnestness respecting bygone things which didn't signify now and were not worth a thought.

Of course Janet put this down to his superior knowledge and experience, still she could not wish to forego the vivid pleasure her own freshness afforded her,

even to reach the high mental level of her husband.

She gradually came to do all her sight-seeing under the guardianship of Mrs. Raynes, who appeared to know a little of everything, having served a variety of mistresses — the wildly gay, the serious minded, the severely intellectual, but she was not given to talk of her past—only a stray word here and there suggested to her young lady her various experiences.

Between her sight - seeing, her French studies and her faithful correspondence with her father, Janet had sometimes a push to be ready in time for luncheon with her husband, who amused himself much more in Paris, than in Rome or Florence, and was now quite ready to go out of an evening, and pleased to return the hospitalities of his friends.

Janet was sometimes amused and surprised at herself for the rapidity with which she had become acclimatized to the habits and customs of the wealthy “upper ten”—

generally this process was facilitated by the good breeding of the people with whom she associated ; of course among them there was a sprinkling of the brusque and insolent, but Mrs. Palliser of Mervyn Hall was too well placed, too well backed up by a husband known to, and versed in, the ways of society, to be troubled by the presumption or ill-nature of these exceptions ; she was calm and fearless, and strong in the affection and approbation of her husband.

The only shadow of difference between them was on the question of dancing. The English Ambassador gave a ball, and Janet, enchanted to dance again, and to such delightful music as she had never danced to before, accepted all offers, and spun lightly round the room with attachés and distinguished foreigners of all nations. She was enjoying herself immensely when she caught a glimpse of Palliser looking after her with an expression such as she had never before seen on his face.

The moment the dance was over she went

up to him and, dismissing her partner with a smile and a few pleasant words, she put her arm through her husband's and asked him what had happened to annoy him.

"Do I show my annoyance so unguardedly?" he asked, his countenance clearing a little.

"I can always tell what you are thinking about," she said, "I know every change in your face—others may not."

"I am annoyed, and with *you*, it is very thoughtless of you to dance—you will over-fatigue yourself, which is never wise, and—and I don't like to see my wife whirling round with every nobody that asks her."

"But, Randal," she returned, rather overwhelmed, "I am perfectly strong and well, and these men are your own acquaintances. They are very nice, too, I like them all."

"Well, *I* am not so catholic in my likings, and I do not care to see you so—so abandoned to the pleasure of the moment."

Janet laughed, to Palliser's surprise, who expected to see tears filling her eyes.

“I really think you are very silly, but if it annoys you, dear, I will not dance any more, though”—showing him her card—“you see all the dances I am engaged for! I do not know how I am to excuse myself—and the cotillon—oh, I should like to dance the cotillon!” she looked up into his face with a sweet, frank smile—but his brow did not quite relax.

“It is foolish, and I do not like it,” he said, “but you must not make yourself remarkable. I will make your excuses to—let me see”—taking her card—“oh, that Hungarian fellow, well, I shall manage him—he speaks English well. Come, you had better sit down over here beside Mrs. Dacre.”

He turned as he spoke, and his face changed immediately on finding himself face to face with a gentleman, an extremely sunburnt gentleman, fair haired and blue-eyed, shorter than himself, but broader, squarer, and older.

“Why, Saville, I had no idea you were in Paris!” exclaimed Palliser, in considerable surprise.

“Only arrived this morning—met Lord D—— by accident, he asked me to come to the ball to-night, and here I am! Come, my dear fellow, present me to your wife.”

“Sir Frederic Saville—Mrs. Palliser,” said her husband in proper form.

Janet smiled and put out her hand.

“Lady Saville has so often spoken of you,” was her introductory remark.

Sir Frederic elevated his eyebrows as he took the hand she offered.

“My dear Mrs. Palliser, it is an awful thing to be discussed by the wife of one’s bosom.”

“You would not think so if you had heard the discussion,” returned Janet, rather startled by his words; “we thought you must have returned to England, but I have not heard from Lady Saville for some time.”

“She is not the best of correspondents—but let us find a seat. I have been longing to make your acquaintance. Palliser, dispose of yourself somewhere, and let me make the best impression I can upon your wife.”

“Very well—I will go and get rid of one of her cavaliers, at least.” And he went off with a smile and a nod which told Janet she was forgiven.

“Do you know you are not a bit like what I expected you to be?” resumed Sir Frederic, as he took his place beside Janet on a sofa in a convenient recess, while he looked at her from head to foot very critically. “When Lady Saville did write, she generally said a great deal about you. I believe you are devoted friends, and have as yet had no opportunity of quarrelling?”

“Lady Saville has been charming to me, and we shall put off quarrelling as long as we can,” returned Janet good-humouredly.

“Possibly you may manage to keep the peace a little longer—that is, if she intends to favour me with her company—for I am not going to stay in England.”

“Shall you return to the East then?” with some surprise.

“The East? Oh, no—I am unfortunately ineligible either for civil or military service.

I am going to Scotland for fishing, and then I may go to Norway in June. After, God knows—at any rate if Gertrude deigns to come with *me*, your friendship may survive a little longer!” and he laughed—not very pleasantly.

“I hope you will come and see us, first.”

“Thank you! It is an age since I was at the Hall—capital hunting country about there—or used to be.”

“It is still good, I believe.”

“Do you hunt yourself? I suppose so, as you are country bred?”

“No, nor do I think I ever shall. I did not begin early enough to have the nerve!”

“Ha!” with another long, keen look, “you look like a plucky one.”

“Looks are often deceptive.”

“I fancy yours are truthful, at present.”

“What a painfully prophetic tone, Sir Frederic.”

“We’ll see, Mrs. Palliser; so far, it seems to me that Randal is going to have his early ill-luck made up to him.”

Janet flushed up to the brow, pained by this careless allusion to her husband's great mistake, and looking round for him, met his eyes with a loving glance which he interpreted as an expression of penitence for her unconscious misdoing. So mollified, he approached, followed by the dispossessed Hungarian, who addressed her :

“Perhaps you will be so gracious as to give me one more dance in place of that which I have lost?”

“With pleasure, if there is one free before we leave,” and she gave him her card.

Then one of the English attachés came to claim her, and she left Palliser in conversation with his brother-in-law.

Before the cotillon arrived, however, Palliser discovered he had a slight headache, that he feared the champagne was queer, and that he should like to go home. Janet laughed at his indisposition, declaring she knew it was only to prevent her from dancing any more, that the headache had been so obliging as to threaten him. She made no

opposition, however, to his wish to leave the ball-room, and bidding good-night to Sir Frederic Saville, they returned to the hotel contentedly enough.

The lamp was still alight in the sitting-room, and Janet paused there to rest after the heated atmosphere of the ball before undressing.

“That dress suits you very well,” said Palliser, as the dignified Raynes took away her mistress’s cloak. “What colour do you call it?”

“Eau-de-Nile. Yes, I like it, and the garniture of water lilies—‘fine feathers make fine birds!’ You remember the washed-out cotton you first saw me in, Randal?”

“Yes. Well, it was a royal robe, for it was worn by my queen! Did you think me a disagreeable brute to-night, Janet?”

“A brute! Oh, no—never! Only it was not exactly ‘a lucid interval,’ Randal,” holding out her hand to him.

“You don’t know how anxious I am about you, my darling,” pressing it tenderly.

“Why? I am not a delicate, consumptive creature to whom the least additional exertion might be fatal!”

“No, thank Heaven! Still, you must promise me to curb your love of dancing. How would you like *me* to whisk other women round the room all night?”

“I should be charmed to see you enjoy yourself—why, you might even dance with *me*! I *should* enjoy a dance with you, Randal! I am not in the least jealous by nature.”

“Then, pray remember *I* am! I know I could be desperately jealous and—unforgiving. Though, if I could ever trust anyone implicitly it would be you, Janet!”

“And *I* trust *you* without an ‘if.’ Tell me, Randal, is Sir Frederic Saville a jealous husband?”

“Who—Saville? No, no one can accuse him of that vice,” and Palliser laughed. There was a touch of scorn in his laughter. “By the way, I think Gertrude may join him here. If so, she might help you to choose

some things for your presentation dress. It is a good opportunity."

"I have quantities of things waiting for me in London, you know — my wedding-dress——"

"No matter," interrupted Palliser. "Your court dress must be in the latest fashion."

"I suppose Lady Saville will present me?"

"Yes—if she is in Town. She had much better go with Saville to Scotland."

"Naturally. But she was quite looking forward to having the boys with her at Easter, they were to go to Lord Darrell's place for the holidays."

"I suppose she will come over here now. I wish she had a little more respect for appearances!"

"Who?" asked Janet, immensely surprised.

"My sister. But it is too late to gossip, get to bed as soon as you can—you will find yourself pretty well done up to-morrow—or rather this morning."

In spite, however, of urgent letters from

Mr. and Mrs. Palliser, and, it was supposed, from her husband also, Lady Saville declined to join her relatives in Paris. It was so near Easter that the journey to and fro would only be useless fatigue, and she was particularly anxious to be with her boys, as after Midsummer the eldest was to go to a crammer's.

The Lady Darrell with whom the holidays were to be spent, was Sir Frederic's sister and his elder by many years; she was blest with an only son, Lord Darrell, to whom her life was devoted.

Janet was sorry that Lady Saville decided to remain in England; she had always found her sister-in-law a pleasant companion, and was grateful for her many kindnesses. Moreover, though he did not appear to have any particular regard for Sir Frederic, Palliser was a great deal with him, and Janet found she had a little more time for sight-seeing and study than she quite liked. She was far too well-tempered and reasonable to let this irritate or distress her. It was a temporary interruption to her delightful *tête-à-tête* with

her husband which would soon be at an end, and at Mervyn, the already beloved home which awaited her, their lives would grow more completely into one than they had been yet.

Still, she could not help perceiving that Sir Frederic Saville's company had not exactly a beneficent effect on his brother-in-law. Palliser was more impatient and dissatisfied than she had ever seen him, and Janet grew quite anxious to return to London, and see with her own eyes how the dear old Dad had borne the long separation from the joy of his life.

Saville dined with them much oftener than she liked, and, although he professed very openly the greatest admiration for herself, his mode of showing it was extremely unpleasant. He seemed to have no belief in anything, and his conversation, though kept fairly within decent limits, made her feel rather uneasy as to what was coming next; with all his talk about beauty and its boundless power, she could see that his contempt

for women was great, though tolerably concealed under the manners of good society. Finally, it seemed to her that he drank an unusual quantity of wine, although it never affected him in the least.

In fact, the presence of Sir Frederic Saville rather spoiled the latter part of her stay in Paris. She was rarely alone with her husband in the evening, and when she was he spoke little and seemed preoccupied.

"I should not like to be married to Sir Frederic Saville!" she said on one of these rare occasions, looking up from a letter she was writing to his wife.

"I hope you would not!" returned Palliser smiling.

"Ah! but I mean, I do not think he can be a kind or a pleasant husband."

"Well, I am not sure. He is rather an amusing fellow—not exactly suited to holy orders, but generous and good-natured. He is popular with men."

"But not with women, I imagine?"

"Yes, he is—with some kinds of women—

very popular!—not with blue stockings who read Buckle's History, etc., etc.," laughing.

Janet laughed, too.

"At all events, Randal, I keep my culpable tastes to myself! I do not bore people with them."

"No, I must grant that. I assure you, he and Gertrude were devilishly in love with each other, in fact, it was rather a bore."

"Dear Randal—what an expression! Say 'angelically in love!'"

"There was deuced little of the angel about *him*, at all events, and Gertrude, you know, made the mistake women often make—of expecting things to go on at the same high pressure at which they began."

Janet was silent. Her husband's words suggested a train of not too agreeable reflection. Palliser watched her for a moment, and was about to speak, when she forestalled him by exclaiming, as if out of her thoughts: "But your sister is so loveable, so full of tact, that I should think her husband could never tire of her."

“Never and for ever are long words, Janet, to apply to any relationship, any state of feeling. It is wise to try and enjoy the present and let the future take care of itself. I see poor Saville is no favourite of yours.”

“Well, no, not yet.”

“You are ungrateful. He admires you loudly!”

Janet only shook her head, and went on with her letter. When she had finished it and closed her blotting-book, she came over to where Palliser sat half asleep over a paper, and kissed his forehead.

“You and I, dear,” she said, “are to be an extra sensible couple, and settle down to real comradeship quite soon! I daresay the ‘sober certainty of waking bliss’ in the calmness of everyday life is sweetest of all.”

Palliser drew her down to him.

“Come what may, darling, the present is delicious—too delicious for sense or calmness.”

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Ten days later they left for London, Sir Frederic having proceeded them.

It was very delightful to Janet to hear English spoken all round her after more than four months' sojourn among foreigners and the sound of strange tongues.

Palliser had taken a suite of rooms in one of the huge *caravanserais* which overlook St. James' Park, from a friend, who had been suddenly ordered to the Riviera. Here he proposed to stay till after the Drawing-room, at which he wished his wife to be presented, and Janet, not without some longing to go "home," at once consented; she had suggested, with a curious, uneasy reluctance, that her father should be invited to stay for a short time, and Palliser had given a brief, abrupt consent.

How delightful it was to find the dear, broad weather-beaten face ready to meet her, as she alighted at their temporary abode. With what joy she fell into his arms, and eagerly scanned the well-known countenance.

"Well, my pet!" cried the old man in more tremulous accents than Janet had ever heard

from his lips before, "you are looking better than I ever saw you. Not quite as rosy as usual, perhaps, and a trifle changed, in fact, my girl has turned into a fine lady!"

"Oh, no, dearest Dad, anything but that! I try to be well behaved and careful of what I assert or admit, but that sort of thing bores me dreadfully. I am happiest when I can say out everything I think to Randal!"

"That's right, my dear, tell your husband everything."

"Fortunately I can. If he were a different kind of man, I could not."

"And what's become of him? Didn't he come with you?"

"Oh, yes," she returned. He went on to his club, and will be here soon—you will stay a while with us, dear? You could not answer my letter before we started, but——"

"No, Janet, I don't think I'll put up here, though I'll dine with you occasionally. Tom has found me a room where he lodges, away in the West Kensington district; it's quite convenient, what with the trains and omni-

busses. Tom and I have a good deal to talk about and settle. Between you and me and the post, Tom is thinking of being spliced—to a deuced nice girl too; she's a daughter of Treadaway (Treadaway and Green), a very eminent firm of solicitors, and if we could only scrape a couple of thousand pounds together, Tom would be taken in as junior partner, for Green is in bad health, and they want an active young fellow and a good lawyer, which Tom is. Well, we can manage about seventeen hundred, so I am going to raise the rest on my house and furniture; it won't cost more than eight or ten pounds a year, and what is that compared to giving your brother a good start?"

"What indeed!" exclaimed Janet, with eager sympathy, "poor, dear Tom! I do hope he will be happy; what is this Miss Treadaway like? It is a very ugly name!"

"I hope she will soon change it for the better! She is a black-eyed blooming beauty, that is, very nearly a beauty; none of your ethereal skin and bone creatures, but a fine

woman, and plenty of her ; she may be a month or two older than Tom, but that's his affair. He hasn't popped the question yet, but he may any moment. I hope you'll have them up here to dine. I suspect you and Palliser are very big wigs in Treadaway's eyes?"

"I hope she will make Tom happy! Now that I know what marriage is, I can understand how terrible an uncongenial husband or wife must be."

"I don't suppose Tom has quite the same views as you have on these subjects."

Father and daughter talked on happily enough, with an interval for dressing, till dinner was ready, and Janet was delighted to hear all the Langford news. Palliser kept them waiting a little, but was very polite and profuse in his apologies. Janet thought he was rather silent and sleepy, but then, he had been up rather late for two or three nights before they left Paris, so she took no notice of his drowsiness. The happy old father-in-law talked for all, and thoroughly enjoyed a good dinner and sound glass of wine.

He was much amused and interested by the "lift," and had some talk with the porter who worked it.

"Sorry you will not put up with us," said Palliser, as he was bidding the old man good-night. "I suppose you must divide yourself between your son and daughter?"

But Captain Rowley did not see as much of his daughter as he hoped.

The following day Lady Saville came up to visit her brother and his wife, and from that day forth, Janet was handed over to dress-makers, milliners, and last, but not least, a renowned dancing-mistress that she might be prepared to courtesy, and carry her train with grace and dignity at the approaching presentation.

Janet was very pleased to have the company of her sister-in-law, and much more interested in her court than in her wedding dress. The fact that her appearance and general effect were matters of vast importance in her husband's eyes, and therefore to her position, had begun to dawn upon her, and

it was consequently very apparent to Lady Saville that her countrified sister-in-law was greatly improved and much more companionable. While on her side, Janet observed that Lady Saville looked ill and worn, that her gaiety was slightly hysterical, her careless cynicism was moreover somewhat bitter. She had changed her mind, too, about presenting Janet.

There was little time for attention to her father, and though Janet asked Tom twice to dinner, her husband was only present on one occasion. Still, Captain Rowley held on contentedly enough, and had the gratification of escorting his daughter to call on the charming Miss Treadaway, when Tom's engagement to that young lady was announced, and also of attending the afternoon tea, at which all Mrs. Palliser's more intimate friends assembled, after the Drawing-room, including Sir Frederic Saville, who was most unpleasantly complimentary, and who brought with him his nephew, Lord Darrell, a good-humoured and apparently good-

natured man, not unlike his uncle, only better and less animal looking. And also that well-known and severe "noblewoman," the Dowager Marchioness of Glendore, a distant relation of the Pallisers — who had presented Janet. A tall, distinguished-looking personage in spite of Darrell's declaration that she was indecently bony. It was a joyous gathering to Janet—she had got through the rather dreaded ceremony without blundering; it was all over, and she read admiration and approval in her husband's eyes.

She had never looked so brilliant as she leant on her father's arm, presenting him with loving care to her new friends, and rejoicing in the pride and pleasure which beamed in his face.

CHAPTER IX.

DAPPLED SKIES.

BACK again in the sweet fresh country, among the lovely woods of Mervyn, clothed with the first flush of tender green, full of perfume and of song, and the unspeakable joyousness of renewed youth! How enchanting it was, Janet felt, to come home to such an abode, to find the preparations which had been made for her and which proved the loving thought of her husband.

Her own bedroom, and a room adjoining, had been newly fitted up with exquisite taste and luxurious comfort, the latter as a sitting-room, with a small piano, and all appliances for writing and for study. She was almost frightened to think of the great happiness which had come into her life, of the bright future which lay smiling before her, and

murmured to herself with a momentary feeling of superstition, Cowper's rendering of the Latin poet :

" But oh ! if fortune fill thy sail,
With more than a propitious gale,
Take half thy canvas in."

The crown of all was Palliser's love. It might be a little exacting, he might be a little over-anxious that she should always look her best, and wear costly and becoming garments, but all these tokens of his passionate attachment to her were precious in her sight.

They had stayed somewhat longer than they had intended in Town, but it was difficult to break away from the invitations showered upon them, and Janet enjoyed Society as she did everything else.

Moreover, Society liked Janet. She was fresh and natural, and free from shyness or *mauvaise honte*, because she was herself glad to please, but perfectly innocent of any attempt to create an effect. At some of the houses where they dined, she met men of

culture and high intelligence, to whose talk it was a delight to listen, and from even such as these, her bright face and eager attention attracted a good deal of notice.

Palliser, fastidious and hypercritical as he was, felt satisfied that he had reaped a deserved reward for his judgment and disinterestedness, in selecting so sweet a wild flower to share his position, and even to adorn it.

Janet carried a host of new ideas away with her from the great intellectual cauldron of London Society, and cogitated many plans for her poor people and her schools. Fortunately the modest common sense which stood her in good stead all her life, kept her from troubling her husband too soon about such matters, perceiving that he did not much care for what did not originate with himself.

He absorbed her time a good deal, and she had to refrain from asking her friend Mary Winyard to stay at the Hall, as she knew that Palliser could not be bored with ordinary

women, and still preferred a *tête-à-tête* with herself, to any society save indeed that of men connected with politics.

The Winyards, however, were always welcome guests when any social gatherings took place.

It was not easy either to see as much of her father as she wished, but in this matter, Captain Rowley was quite reasonable, as fathers usually are, contrasting favourably with mothers.

These crumpled rose leaves were of small importance. But even in the happy valley, the demon of discontent will raise its hydra head, and presently Palliser began to want something to do. He did not care for fishing, the only sport available at that season, and he did not seem to care about riding, nor was he inclined to continue his instructions to Janet in that 'witching art.

"You always contrive to be busy, Janet," he said half enviously one morning, as he lounged into her sitting room, and found her writing diligently in a large book. "What

are you about? Have you taken the house accounts from Mrs. Dunford's jurisdiction? If so, we shall have a revolution."

"And a terrible collapse if *I* attempted such a herculean undertaking," she returned, smiling. "I have no such ambition."

"What is it then?" coming over and leaning on the back of her chair.

Janet suddenly laid her hand on the page, while her neat little ears grew a deep pink.

"What! secrets, Janet?" said Palliser.

"Oh, no! read if you like, only—you will laugh at me!"

Palliser kissed the ear nearest him and took up the book.

"Why, what is this about? 'Impressions!' Are you going to rush into print? I should prefer your muddling the accounts!" and he carried the book into a bay window which framed in a lovely view over the grounds and woods beyond.

Janet still sat at her writing-table shy and smiling.

"Oh! I see! impressions of your travels!"

You really write a good clear hand, Janet, but I should not call it pretty, it is a trifle too firm for feminine grace. I have seen very little of it—we were saved by propinquity from the foolery of love letters! Ah! ‘Arrived at St. Remo twenty-seventh, blue Mediterranean, cloudless skies, golden rather than silver moonlight, olive trees, enchantment, Byron, Shelley,’” turning over the pages, “um — um — Florence, Dante, Savanarola, Romola, Medici, Rome! Ah! one hundred and twenty-five pages about Rome, my dear child! Every word of this has been said—a dozen—nay—a dozen dozen times before! Pray do not be tempted to waste time and ink on these scribblings. I hope you will find more natural and womanly occupations.”

He threw the book from him with lazy disapprobation.

Janet coloured with wounded *amour propre*, but controlled herself. No doubt it *was* a silly production, yet it interested her to write, but—she would not do battle over it.

"My poor book!" she exclaimed, lifting it from the chair on which it had fallen. "I daresay it seems beneath contempt to you, yet it is an innocent amusement enough, and I never intend to trouble anyone with it. The only person I care to show it to is my father. He used to know the South of Italy well long ago. I wrote it partly for him."

"Ah! well, as you like, only it is cruel waste of time."

"It would be, if I had anything real to do, which I neglected for it!" and with smiling lips, which yet quivered a little, Janet put her book in its especial drawer and locked it.

Palliser looked at her thoughtfully.

"I too want employment. Time, like the pursuing Egyptians, has had his chariot wheels removed, and drives heavily. I almost wish we had stayed a little longer in Town!"

"Don't say so, Randal! It is heavenly here!"

"Put on your hat, and come with me to

the Home farm. I think the old stable there would be the better of being rebuilt, and the cattle sheds are in a bad state. Put on your hat, Janet, and come with me to have a good look at them."

"With pleasure! I shall be with you directly," and she left the room.

"Whatever happens, she shall not make herself and me ridiculous in print, and scribblings of this kind are the beginning of troubles!" said Palliser to himself as he drew his brows together, with a look of annoyance which faded gradually when his wife reappeared in a garden hat, which was large enough to be a parasol as well. Her sunny expression was so innocent of everything like opposition, or self-seeking, that the demons of despotism and temper dispersed before her smiling eyes, as night mists before the fresh light and air of morning.

"That is not a very becoming hat," said Palliser, parting with his ill-humour reluctantly.

"It is very comfortable, and not so bad!"

“Do you know, Janet, you do not think enough about dress? A woman ought to make a serious study of it. You do not do yourself justice.”

“My dear Randal!” looking gravely at herself in a long glass, “I have exhausted my mental powers in attempting to reach a high standard, and I don’t do so badly; perfection is not easily attained—give me time! Don’t you like this frock?”

“It might be worse! Come along, we are wasting time.”

“And it is such a heavenly morning,” returned Janet, as they went out together.

She looked round her, rejoicing in the beauty, and perfume, and music which pervaded earth and air, he, with eyes bent upon the gravel which had not been rolled to his satisfaction.

“Look here,” he grumbled, “here are two tufts of weeds, almost in the middle of the path! How those blind idiots could have gone over it without seeing them, is absolutely incomprehensible!”

“Come across the grass, Randal, and then you will not see the weeds. It is a pity to let anything jar upon you on such a morning as this.”

“You are the most desperately-contented person I have ever met,” exclaimed Palliser, yielding to her contagious brightness. “It is certainly a delicious day!” and they went on in silence, which he presently broke by observing, “I suppose your father is delighted with the genius and the originality of your lucubrations, for I presume he has read your ‘Impressions’?”

“Yes, of course! I fancy he is enchanted, though he tried to be severely critical, dear Dad! He kept the book a fortnight. I shall give it to him altogether when I have added a little bit about Paris. Of course, my father is neither as cultivated nor perhaps as intellectual as you are, and I am not at all shy about showing *him* my scribblings. Now I am a little alarmed at the idea of *your* inspection, so you shall see no more of my impressions!”

"I hope not, because they will not exist except in the unwritten tablets of your memory. For Heaven's sake do not keep a journal!"

"I do not intend to do so! It would be monotonous, for *you* have written one word of happiness all over the pages of my life at present," and she gave him a glance full of gratitude and tenderness.

"Really, Janet, you can say a pretty thing very neatly," returned Palliser smiling. "By the way, speaking of your father, I am rather surprised he likes to live in a dull inland village like Langford. Some seaside place where he could see ships and meet old salts like himself, would be much more suited to him—Beachurst for instance. Did he never think of Beachurst?"

"I never heard him say anything about it, I could not imagine him anywhere but in Navarino Cottage; why, his garden is part of himself."

"Yes! but now he has lost you, he would be the better of some old chums to drop in and talk to him."

“Dear Randal! he has not *lost* me! I see him constantly, and he has the Vicar. I am going to see Mrs. Winyard to-day, and to take some plants to my father, unless you want me to go anywhere with you?”

“No! I shall go with you, after I have examined the farm buildings. I should like to see Perkins the architect, and get some idea of the cost of new ones.”

“That will suit me exactly. I will drive you into Langford. Don’t you think I am growing quite a good whip?”

“You are growing a conceited young woman.”

So talking pleasantly, for Palliser was quite restored to serenity, they reached the farm where much discussion ensued between the Squire and his steward. Extensive improvements were planned, and reparations projected. Palliser grew quite eager to go into Langford after luncheon, in order to put things in train.

Having left her husband at the architect’s office, and arranged that he should meet her

at Navarino Cottage, Janet stopped at the vicarage.

She found Mrs. Winyard sitting in the garden, her work basket on a little Japanese table beside her. She was looking very happy, and the lines of her gentle, care-worn face seemed less marked and softer than usual.

"This is sweet of you, my dear! I did not expect you to come so soon again," said the vicar's wife, as Janet bent down to kiss her.

"You know I love to come, Mrs. Winyard; but I cannot as often as I should like."

"No, I understand that! Mr. Palliser, I dare say, fancies he has the first claim on your time and attention," replied Mrs. Winyard, smiling. "Men are always a little grasping, they would not be fit for their work in life if they were not! Early friends are sometimes great bores to the newly married, especially to newly-married men—as I tell Mary."

“Ah! Mrs. Winyard! I do so hope Mary does not think me careless or unkind. I sometimes fear I may seem so.”

“She is not as reasonable as *I* am, my dear; but she has full faith in you. At all events, she will soon experience the little difficulties of early married days. My dear child has just accepted a gentleman of whom her father and myself quite approve. They are to be married before the summer is over!”

“Dear Mrs. Winyard,” taking her hand, “how terribly you will miss her!”

“I shall, indeed,” with a sigh, “but Eva is growing very helpful and handy, and when I look at my Mary’s happy face, I cannot regret my loss.”

Then followed a profoundly interesting narrative of the circumstances attending Mary’s engagement, and an account of the future bridegroom and his position.

He was a naval officer holding a good Government appointment in the dockyard at Kingsport, and a good deal older than Mary, but evidently the man of her choice.

“Not especially good-looking,” added the mother, “but he has a gentleman-like appearance, and a strong, sensible face. The vicar is very pleased, for he has formed a high opinion of his future son-in-law.”

They talked for a considerable time on this interesting subject. Janet was immensely taken up with the news. Mary had just gone on a visit to the sister of her intended, who lived in Devonshire, and meant to write from thence to her friend.

“I have overstayed my time!” exclaimed Janet, looking at her watch. “I am to meet Mr. Palliser at my father’s, so I must leave you. I will come over in a day or two, and drive you back to tea at the Hall. The grounds are quite delightful now, it would do you good, though indeed, this garden is very sweet. I have always loved it! What news have you of Maurice?” she asked as she stood up to go.

“Very good indeed! He was going with his colonel on a shooting expedition. He seems to be rather a favourite—not, as you

can imagine, that Maurice says this in so many words, but we gather it from his accounts of himself and his life."

"Everyone must like him!" exclaimed Janet; "now I must run away, Mrs. Winyard. I will send you a line to fix the day you will come to me."

Janet drove off rapidly, full of the news she had just heard, and already debating in her own mind what would be the best and most suitable present she could make her friend. "Randal must give her something nice too, he is always generous and ready to give. Oh! I hope she may be as happy as I am—but that is almost impossible!"

Arrived at the cottage, Janet found that her father had started to walk out to the Hall about an hour before, and that Palliser had not yet arrived. Janet felt greatly disappointed. She had not seen her father for several days, and she had a little scheme in her head for carrying him off to dine, and stay the night. Now that he had gone uninvited, it would not be so easy to manage,

for the old sailor was punctilious about his toilette before leaving home, and did not care to stay away in an impromptu manner. She therefore descended from her pony carriage to inspect the removing of the plants she had brought to a sheltered spot in the garden, and by the time this was accomplished, Randal appeared.

“Is it not provoking, Randal, my father has gone out to the Hall! I had hoped to take him back to dine and sleep!”

“Oh, you did, did you?” he returned in a somewhat dry tone, and Janet noticed that he expressed no regret, but that, she told herself the next moment, was a mere accident.

“I, too, was rather unfortunate in missing my man, and waited in that confounded dusty office for some time before Wilkins came in; and then—what do you think? He wanted to drag me off to look at some grand erection in the way of stables which he is building for my financial relative. The fellow talks too much! However, I have told him to come out to-morrow afternoon, and have a look at

the old buildings. Let us go, the ponies are impatient !”

Janet gathered up the reins, and they drove swiftly but somewhat silently back, Palliser employing himself by making pencil notes in his memorandum book.

The short distance was soon accomplished, and Captain Rowley was soon discovered seated on a bench under the shade of a wide-spreading beech facing the house, with a pile of London papers beside him.

“Ah ha ! Madam ! ‘Come on board’ at last,” he cried, as he saw his daughter hastening across the lawn. “Thought I’d wait and see what had become of you.”

“You dear old Dad, I am so sorry you have had this long hot walk. We have just come from the Cottage. We’ll have tea out here directly. Could you not stay over the night ?”

“Impossible, my dear. Couldn’t stay without my togs. Besides, I have promised the Vicar to take ‘pot-luck’ to-day, and talk over Mary’s wedding. Hey ! heard the

news?" and they plunged into an animated conversation about the coming event, until Palliser joined them, to whom the news was imparted.

He seemed quite pleased, Janet remarked, and talked with all his old amiability—a change suggesting to her the difference which had of late occasionally developed itself.

"You must help me to choose a nice present for Mary," said Janet to her husband.

"I suppose so," he returned, "and supplement it by one from myself, eh?"

"I hope you will, dear Randal."

Captain Rowley then pointed out a paragraph which had escaped Palliser's notice, in which the public was informed that the Member for Southshire had returned from Vichy, immensely improved in health and vigour.

"By Jove, that old man will live for ever!" cried Palliser impatiently, as he set down his cup, "and he is really not the slightest good to the county. Why do not fellows see the wisdom of abdicating when they cannot

guide their own team—to say nothing of public affairs?”

“Quite true,” added Captain Rowley, “when one hasn’t a strong grip for the rudder spokes, you should give up to one who has, but, Palliser, no one likes to give up,” and they fell into a discussion on registration and the balance of parties in the county.

“Well, my dear father,” put in Janet when there was a pause, “if you cannot stay now, when will you come to dine and stay a day or two? You have not been here for quite ten days.”

“You see, Janet, I am aware I am on the superannuated list, so I don’t want to parade my fogeyism too often,” he returned laughing.

“What nonsense. Isn’t it nonsense, Randal? Come on Thursday and stay till Saturday—I know you like your own church.”

“I hope you will, Captain Rowley,” returned Palliser, but a little coldly.

“Thanks, my dear boy—I shall be delighted.”

“If you will excuse me,” continued

Palliser, "I will go and write a letter or two—I have just had a long epistle from Darrell, which requires a reply. There is a letter from my sister too. I shall leave it on my writing-table for you, Janet. Good morning, Captain Rowley, in case I should not see you till Thursday." They shook hands, and Palliser walked quickly back to the house.

"Is he all right?" asked Captain Rowley, nodding in the direction of his vanishing son-in-law.

"Yes, quite right, I think. Why do you ask?"

"I can hardly say, but he doesn't seem up to concert pitch. Then a man can't be always in the full blaze of good humour—but you are too sensible a girl to ask him what is the matter. If he is not inclined to tell of his own accord, asking won't make him. Ah!—this is a lovely place—I wonder if an old fellow might smoke his pipe of peace here?"

"Yes, of course you may, dear, or shall I get you some cigars?"

“No, thank you! It may not be elegant, but I love my old pipe. Now, my dear, don’t let me be late for the Vicar’s dinner.”

“I will take care—I will tell Dickson to order the dog-cart for six—that will give you time enough, they dine at a quarter to seven still?”

Captain Rowley nodded, and continued to smoke in a luxurious fashion—talking from time to time of his son Tom’s improved prospects, of his return from his wedding tour, and Mrs. Tom’s amiable wish that her father-in-law should pay them a visit.

“Not just now though, Janet. No, I couldn’t put up with London when the garden is looking its best. And, my dear—I miss that stroll round with you in the early mornings, while the tea was drawing!” and the old man sighed and resumed his pipe.

“Dearest Dad!” cried Janet with moist eyes, “I am afraid you miss me terribly—I cannot bear to think of it.”

“Hoot—stuff and nonsense!” said the Captain stoutly. “I can tell you when I sit

down with my book and pipe, it's uncommonly pleasant to think that when I'm no longer here to look after my girl, you'll have a better fellow than I am to take care of you, and a beautiful home for yourself and your children! Don't you trouble about the old Dad, he'll have a fine peaceful time of it for the rest of his days."

Janet slipped her hand into his and they sat thus for several minutes in sympathetic silence. Then Captain Rowley began to talk of his garden and how he intended to place the plants his daughter had left for him. So the time melted away until the sedate Dickson came to say the dog-cart was at the door.

Janet accompanied her father to the entrance, and saw him start homeward. Then she returned slowly to the house. Not finding Palliser in the library, she went up stairs to dress for dinner.

"Do you think this becomes me as well as my green with the white lace?" asked Janet, as she stood before the glass when her toilette was finished.

“Well, ’m—I should say more so, though the green suits you well, too ; but for your complexion, and in daylight, the pale lilac and just the slight garniture of black Brussels lace is the very thing with your hair and colour.”

“I fear I am growing too fond of dress, Raynes.”

“Oh, dear no, ’m—if I may make the remark, you used not to care enough about it. A lady like you ought to think a deal of herself—the more she thinks of herself, the more others think of her.”

“That is a dreadful doctrine, Raynes.”

“But it is true, ’m. I well remember when I was in young Lady Compton’s service she was——”

“There is the bell,” exclaimed Janet, not sorry to escape Raynes’ discursive reminiscences.

Palliser was waiting for her in the bay window of the smaller drawing room, and as she approached she felt that her dress was satisfactory, from the softened expression

that came over his brow and into his eyes, while he offered her his arm, and pressed hers slightly to him while they walked into the dining-room.

“I find, Janet, I must go up to Town on Thursday. Darrell writes that they—that is, as many of our party who were in Cashmere together a few years ago are in Town—are going to give a dinner to Carthew, the man who was chief of our expedition, and managed everything for us. He has just come over, and I should like to pay him the compliment of being present. You will explain all this to your father. I will try to return on Friday if I possibly can.”

“Yes, of course, Randal. It will be nice for me to have him while you are away—but come back as soon as you can.”

“Very well, I think I shall bring Darrell back with me—he wants to talk about a yachting expedition to you. He has started a new yacht and wants us to take a cruise with him round the west coast of Scotland.”

"It would be perfectly delightful," cried Janet.

"You are a tolerable sailor," said Palliser, doubtfully.

"I am a very good one. Don't you remember how rough it was when we went for a few days to Corsica, and I kept perfectly well?"

"True; it could not do you any harm—it will help us over the summer, for, however charming the place and—yourself, there is a certain monotony, so you must talk it over with Darrell. I rather like Darrell—he's a bit wild, but is steadying down. Have you read Gertrude's letter?"

"Not yet."

"Well, I will bring it to you—she does not seem very happy. Saville went off to Norway after a very short spell of Scotland, and she has been rather unsettled since."

"I am so sorry! Are you going to ask her down here?"

"Yes—later, and the boys, if Alec passes."

"If not, poor boy, he will want something to cheer him up."

"Of course!—in any case."

"Gertrude is immensely fond of him, but I don't fancy he is over bright."

They rose from table, and Palliser brought the letter. It was short and said very little—she was in London, waiting for her boy to go with her somewhere—probably to the Isle of Wight.

After a few words respecting it, Janet proposed a stroll by moonlight, and wrapping a lace scarf round her she slipped her arm through Palliser's and they strolled out into the soft darkness of the fresh, fragrant night, while he gradually began to speak of the future—of his strong wish to represent the county.

"You see, one tires of everything that has not a touch of reality in it," he said. "Now, to be an active politician is an ambition worthy of any Englishman! I have tried a great many things, but nothing lasts. We must make ourselves popular, Janet!"

“Certainly!” exclaimed Janet, with vivid interest. “Or, rather, increase your popularity—you are very much liked already! How I should enjoy the excitement of an election!”

“If I were elected, it would entail a rather racketty life for the larger half of the year—I must have a house in Town. I suppose you would not consider that an attendant evil, eh, Janet?”

“I am not quite sure—I love the Hall, and I love Langford, but I found London delightful, too.”

They talked confidentially for some time. To Janet it was a peculiarly happy hour, she felt that her husband was speaking to her as to a second self—indeed, that he was barely conscious for the moment that she was a separate individual, so engrossed was he in his own projects and hopes, and Janet was far too eagerly sympathetic to perceive or care how much she was overlooked, only that he might bring his ambition—his noble ambition, as she considered it—to successful fulfilment.

It is well that those we love believe in us, and view us through Love's rose-coloured spectacles! Colder and more impartial observers might have termed this noble ambition vanity writ large.

* * * * *

Captain Rowley readily excused Palliser's absence, and greatly enjoyed his *tête-à-tête* visit to his daughter, which extended to the fourth day.

"Why will you not stay till Monday, dear father?" she asked the morning he was going to leave.

"For a couple of reasons—first, I am quite sure Palliser would rather come back to a duet than to a trio, and have you all to himself after this your first separation, and I am quite of his opinion; secondly, I prefer my own little den to any other place. Honestly, if I could have *you* on a visit to *me*, instead of coming on a visit to *you*, I should prefer it—but that cannot be. I'll ask the curate to come and dine and have a hit at backgammon—we'll be as jolly as sand boys!"

But Janet prepared herself for the joy of receiving Palliser in vain. Instead, came a horrid telegram, warning her not to expect him till the day but one following.

The evening was cruelly long and unaccountably melancholy. Janet told herself a dozen times that she was a weak fool. But a sudden grey cloud with a chill and moaning breeze seemed to have come up out of the dim future, and wrapped her in its depressing mantle.

END OF VOL. I.

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